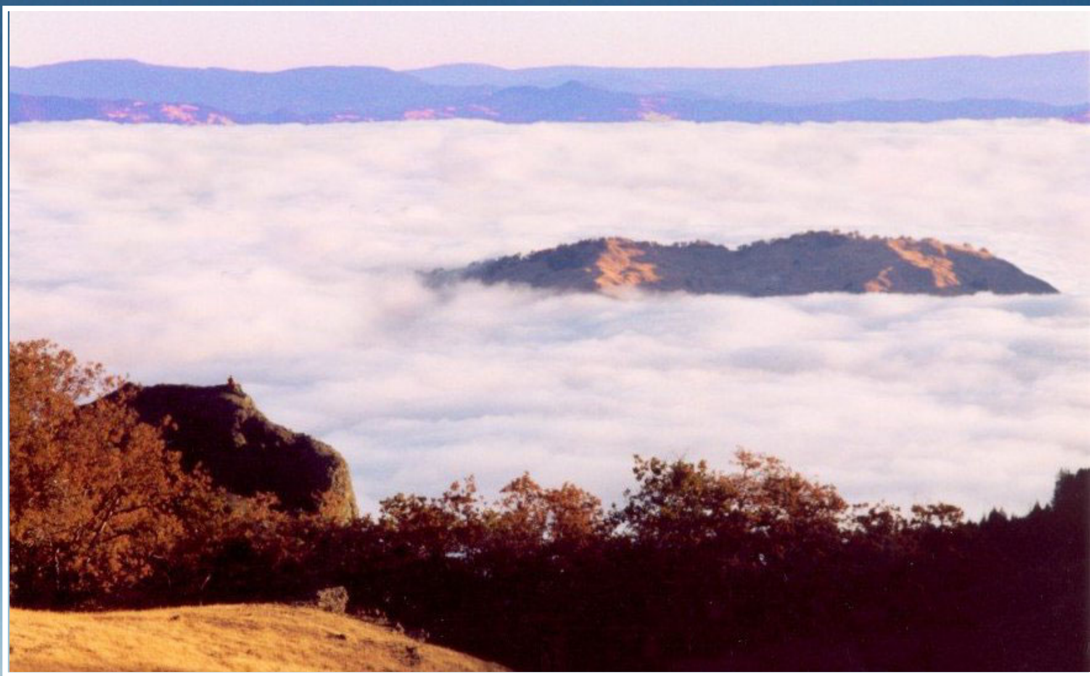
The Island



An anthology of the Buddha's teachings on Nibbāna

Ajahn Pasanno & Ajahn Amaro

The Island

An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna

Edited and with Commentary by
Ajahn Pasanno & Ajahn Amaro

Abhayagiri Monastic Foundation

It is the Unformed, the Unconditioned, the End,
the Truth, the Other Shore, the Subtle,
the Everlasting, the Invisible, the Undiversified,
Peace, the Deathless, the Blest, Safety,
the Wonderful, the Marvellous,
Nibbāna, Purity, Freedom,
the Island,
the Refuge, the Beyond.
~ S 43.1-44

Having nothing,
clinging to nothing:
that is the Island,
there is no other;
that is Nibbāna, I tell you,
the total ending of ageing and death.
~ SN 1094

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PREFACES

~ Ajahn Pasanno ~

Having been a person who has enjoyed reading books, my involvement in the production of this volume has instilled in me a much greater appreciation for those who do write books. When the end of suffering (Nibbāna) is the topic, one would think the writing about it would be less suffering. Curious how some things are not as they appear.

My involvement with this began with my jotting down a variety of sutta quotes which I had come across in my readings which I found inspiring and which also, for me, helped to clarify the direct and immediate path of the Buddha. Mostly they were things that I found helpful in my own practice and it was good to have them in one place for me to read from time to time. There was also a question in my own mind about the interest in the West concerning non-dual teachings, both within the Buddhist fold and outside it.

When coming across passages that people were quoting, I found it striking how seldom that the words of the Buddha were being used to illustrate this. By slowly reflecting on various suttas which cropped up as interesting or striking, the nature of what is considered non-dual for me started to change. Basic teachings started to take on new meaning. The teaching on non-self, which is totally fundamental, is an example. This is not an obscure teaching in the suttas: If there is any hint of self, a position is then taken and the whole realm of saṃsāra unfolds.

The Buddha points this out in many ways, both in detail and in quite pithy discourses. The teaching on dependent origination is another example. It can get very complex and heady, but in essence, this is a description of the Buddha's enlightenment and a way of viewing phenomena which takes us away from the narrative that we easily create, showing that experience is just these mental and physical conditions functioning together in a certain pattern – either for freedom

or for entanglement. Generally, it is stated that the Buddha did not teach much about Nibbāna, that he focused more on the path of practice and left it to us to figure it out for ourselves – if we followed the path correctly. On a certain level this may be true, but as this compilation shows, the Buddha *did* say a great deal about Nibbāna. A large part of the motivation to help bring this book into being was to gather together quotes of the Buddha's own words from the discourses which help to illustrate and (hopefully) clarify the Buddha's teachings, in particular those about the goal, Nibbāna.

We are, in a way, taking the opportunity to bring out jewels and treasures from a cave or a hidden place and allowing them to shine forth. Ideally, this is an opportunity to gather the words of the Buddha on a particular theme together into one place for people to delight in. Hopefully the editors have not got in the way too much and the Buddha's words and path are left clear.

I do want to express my appreciation for all the many people who have helped to make this book become a reality, particularly Ajahn Amaro who gently kept prodding me and was patient with my pace (or lack of it).

~ Ajahn Amaro ~

For myself, the very first seed for the idea of this compilation of the Buddha's Teachings was sown sometime in 1980. I had been living for a few months at the newly opened monastery at Chithurst, in West Sussex, England. I had only arrived there the previous autumn from Thailand; I had been ordained as a monk for scarcely a year and I was still very new to the whole thing.

As I listened to the daily Dhamma talks of Ajahn Sumedho, the abbot and founder of the monastery, I noticed that over and over again he made mention of Ultimate Reality, the Unconditioned, the Unborn and Nibbāna. This was very striking since, during my couple of years in monasteries in Thailand, I had hardly heard a word spoken about this, even though it was the goal of the spiritual life.

Certainly that goal, of the realization of Nibbāna, was acknowledged as the overriding aim of the practice. However, it was stressed repeatedly that the Buddha's emphasis was on the path, the means whereby that goal could genuinely be reached, rather than on rendering inspiring descriptions of the end to which the path led. "Make the journey!" it was said, "the nature of the destination takes care of itself and will be vividly apparent on arrival. Besides, the true nature of Ultimate Reality is necessarily inexpressible by language or concept. So just make the journey and be content." This had made sense to me, so I now wondered why it was that Ajahn Sumedho made such an emphasis on it.

Being an inquisitive sort, and not very good at holding back, one day I asked him the question straight out. His reply struck me very deeply and affected the way in which I have thought and spoken ever since. He said:

"After teaching in the West for a very short period of time, I began to see that many people were disappointed both in materialism and theistic religions. To them Buddhism had great appeal but, lacking any fundamental sense of, or faith in the transcendent, the practice of Buddhism became almost a dry, technical procedure – intellectually satisfying but strangely sterile as well.

"They had largely rejected the idea of an Ultimate Reality from their thoughts as being intrinsically theistic nonsense so I realized that people needed to be aware that there was also such a principle in the Buddha's teachings, without there being any hint of a creator God in the picture. In Thailand, because there is already such a broad and strong basis of faith in these transcendent qualities, there is no need to talk about Ultimate Reality, the Unconditioned and so forth – for them it can be a distraction. Here, I saw that people needed something to look up to – that's why I talk about it all the time. It goes a long way to cultivating faith and it gives a much more living and expansive quality to their spiritual life; there is a natural joy when the heart opens to its true nature."

Fast forward now to late 1997:

Other seeds for this anthology began to come from several different directions. One of these was a conversation with Nancy van House in the parking lot of an Episcopalian church in Palo Alto, at the end of a weekend session on the subject of 'The Graduated Teachings – Anupubbīkathā.' The weekend had been organized by the Sati Center, a Buddhist studies group based in the San Francisco Bay Area, and people were keen for more such sessions in the future.

"Do you have any suggestions for topics?" I asked, as we walked towards our vehicles, arms laden with sundry mats, folders and shrine gear.

"How about Nibbāna?" replied Nancy, smiling gleefully.

"Now *that* should be interesting..." thought I.

The subject had (predictably) come up a few times during the weekend, and it was clear that people had all sorts of conflicting or unformed feelings and impressions about what the word meant, how important it was or wasn't, and how attainable or unattainable it might be. In people's minds it seemed to be like some ancient or mythical country – like Wallachia or Avalon, Bactria or Uddiyana – written and spoken of by some as if familiar and commonplace, yet mysterious and distant, full of complexities to the neophyte.

"Great idea," I replied.

Not long after this, as I had begun to gather my wits, crack a few books of Pali suttas and pick Ajahn Pasanno's brains on the subject, I was approached by

James Baraz with the request that I help out with his new Community Dharma Leaders training program. This is an effort to give people who lead meditation groups, or otherwise have responsible roles in their Dharma communities, all around the USA, a more complete foundation in the Teachings and more external support for their work and practice. They were due to have their inaugural week-long session at Santa Sabena retreat center in San Rafael and James wanted to know what I would like to offer when I came along.

"What would you like me to talk about?" I replied.

"Well, there's so much interest in advaita vedanta and dzogchen amongst the vipassanā community these days, I thought it might be interesting if you were able to talk about similar 'non-duality' teachings in Theravāda – I know there are some but I'm not knowledgeable enough to track them all down. It would be *really* interesting if you could do that – people seem to have the idea that such teachings do not exist in the Theravāda world so they feel they have to look for them elsewhere. It would be great if you could present something on this."

I told him that I had begun to research that very same thing and so the momentum gathered. As we settled into our winter retreat of January and February '98, I got into more discussions on the subject with Ajahn Pasanno. It turned out that he had been gathering quotations on this same area of the teachings for years; he had jewels stashed away that I never dreamed existed. Slowly the piles of paper increased, the scanner hummed and the material sorted itself into a number of convenient if not definitive headings.

As time went by, and the collection got presented on different occasions more and more elements fell into place and the shape of the notes became more refined.

What is presented here is neither presumed to be definitive nor exhaustive. It is simply an attempt by Ajahn Pasanno and myself to put together a small compendium of these 'essence teachings' of the Buddha, as they appear in the Pali Canon and have been conveyed by the lineages that rely upon them (the Thai forest tradition in particular), in the hope that they will be of benefit to those who rejoice in the liberation of the heart. All the other references that are made herein, whether drawing on Thai forest meditation masters, modern science, classical literature, Northern Buddhism or whatever, are made solely to help illustrate the meaning of the Pali – it is the faith of the editors that the Buddha's words can speak for themselves and this work has been compiled with that intention.

It should also be said that we have largely quoted here contemporary passages and sources with which Ajahn Pasanno and I have had direct contact. Thus the voice representing the Theravāda world here is principally that of the

Thai forest tradition, rather than that of Burmese or Sri Lankan masters.

With respect to the Northern Buddhist world, it is mainly the scriptures and teachings that we have received through personal contacts that have found their way onto these pages; in particular we have had a close connection and friendship with the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (the late founding abbot, Ven. Master Hsüan Hua, donated half the land that comprises Abhayagiri Monastery).

Again, there is no intention to exclude any other worthwhile points of view, it is solely the wish to present practices and teachings that we have used and benefited from ourselves that has defined the choice of material.

Lastly, we will be delighted to be introduced to any similar or compatible passages from the Pali Canon, or other sources, for possible inclusion in future editions.

Abhayagiri Forest Monastery
California

INTRODUCTION

~ Ajahn Sumedho ~

A DIFFICULTY WITH THE WORD 'NIBBĀNA' IS THAT ITS meaning is beyond the power of words to describe. It is, essentially, undefinable.

Another difficulty is that many Buddhists see Nibbāna as something unobtainable – as so high and so remote that we're not worthy enough to try for it. Or we see Nibbāna as a goal, as an unknown, undefined something that we should somehow try to attain.

Most of us are conditioned in this way. We want to achieve or attain something that we don't have now. So Nibbāna is looked at as something that, if you work hard, keep the sīla, meditate diligently, become a monastic, devote your life to practice, then your reward might be that eventually you attain Nibbāna – even though we're not sure what it is.

Ajahn Chah would use the words 'the reality of non-grasping' as the definition for Nibbāna: realizing the reality of non-grasping. That helps to put it in a context because the emphasis is on awakening to how we grasp and hold on even to words like 'Nibbāna' or 'Buddhism' or 'practice' or 'sīla' or whatever.

It's often said that the Buddhist way is not to grasp. But that can become just another statement that we grasp and hold on to. It's a Catch 22: No matter how hard you try to make sense out of it, you end up in total confusion because of the limitation of language and perception. You have to go beyond language and perception. And the only way to go beyond thinking and emotional habit is through awareness of them, through awareness of thought, through awareness of emotion. 'The Island that you cannot go beyond' is the metaphor for this state of being awake and aware, as opposed to the concept of becoming awake and aware.

In meditation classes, people often start with a basic delusion that they

never challenge: the idea that "I'm someone who grasps and has a lot of desires, and I have to practice in order to get rid of these desires and to stop grasping and clinging to things. I shouldn't cling to anything." That's often the position we start from. So we start our practice from this basis and, many times, the result is disillusionment and disappointment, because our practice is based on the grasping of an idea.

Eventually, we realize that no matter how much we try to get rid of desire and not grasp anything, no matter what we do – become a monk, an ascetic, sit for hours and hours, attend retreats over and over again, do all the things we believe will get rid of these grasping tendencies – we end up feeling disappointed because the basic delusion has never been recognized.

This is why the metaphor of 'The Island that you cannot go beyond' is so very powerful, because it points to the principle of an awareness that you can't get beyond. It's very simple, very direct, and you can't conceive it. You have to trust it. You have to trust this simple ability that we all have to be fully present and fully awake, and begin to recognize the grasping and the ideas we have taken on about ourselves, about the world around us, about our thoughts and perceptions and feelings.

The way of mindfulness is the way of recognizing conditions just as they are. We simply recognize and acknowledge their presence, without blaming them or judging them or criticizing them or praising them. We allow them to be, the positive and the negative both. And, as we trust in this way of mindfulness more and more, we begin to realize the reality of 'The Island that you cannot go beyond.'

When I started practising meditation I felt I was somebody who was very confused and I wanted to get out of this confusion and get rid of my problems and become someone who was not confused, someone who was a clear thinker, someone who would maybe one day become enlightened. That was the impetus that got me going in the direction of Buddhist meditation and monastic life.

But then, by reflecting on this position that "I am somebody who needs to do something," I began to see it as a created condition. It was an assumption that I had created. And if I operated from that assumption then I might develop all kinds of skills and live a life that was praiseworthy and good and beneficial to myself and to others but, at the end of the day, I might feel quite disappointed that I did not attain the goal of Nibbāna.

Fortunately, the whole direction of monastic life is one where everything is directed at the present. You're always learning to challenge and to see through your assumptions about yourself. One of the major challenges is the assumption

that "I am somebody who needs to do something in order to become enlightened in the future." Just by recognizing this as an assumption I created, that which is aware knows it is something created out of ignorance, out of not understanding. When we see and recognize this fully, then we stop creating the assumptions.

Awareness is not about making value judgments about our thoughts or emotions or actions or speech. Awareness is about knowing these things fully – that they are what they are, at this moment. So what I found very helpful was learning to be aware of conditions without judging them. In this way, the resultant karma of past actions and speech as it arises in the present is fully recognized without compounding it, without making it into a problem. It is what it is. What arises ceases. As we recognize that and allow things to cease according to their nature, the realization of cessation gives us an increasing amount of faith in the practice of non-attachment and letting go.

The attachments that we have, even to good things like Buddhism, can also be seen as attachments that blind us. That doesn't mean we need to get rid of Buddhism. We merely recognize attachment as attachment and that we create it ourselves out of ignorance. As we keep reflecting on this, the tendency toward attachment falls away, and the reality of non-attachment, of non-grasping, reveals itself in what we can say is Nibbāna.

If we look at it in this way, Nibbāna is here and now. It's not an attainment in the future. The reality is here and now. It is so very simple, but beyond description. It can't be bestowed or even conveyed, it can only be known by each person for themselves.

As one begins to realize or to recognize non-grasping as the Way, then emotionally one can feel quite frightened by it. It can seem like a kind of annihilation is taking place: all that I think I am in the world, all that I regard as stable and real, starts falling apart and it can be frightening. But if we have the faith to continue bearing with these emotional reactions and allow things that arise to cease, to appear and disappear according to their nature, then we find our stability not in achievement or attaining, but in being – being awake, being aware.

Many years ago, in William James' book 'The Varieties of Religious Experience,' I found a poem by A. Charles Swinburne. In spite of having what some have described as a degenerate mind, Swinburne produced some very powerful reflections:

> "Here begins the sea that ends not till the world's end. Where we stand,
> Could we know the next high sea-mark set beyond these waves that gleam,

> We should know what never man hath known, nor eye of man
> hath scanned...
> Ah, but here man's heart leaps, yearning towards the gloom with
> venturous glee,
> From the shore that hath no shore beyond it, set in all the sea."
> ~ From 'On the Verge,' in 'A Midsummer Vacation.'

I found in this poem an echo of the Buddha's response to Kappa's question in the Sutta Nipāta:

> Next was the brahmin student Kappa:
> "Sir," he said, "there are people stuck midstream in the terror and the fear of the rush of the river of being, and death and decay overwhelm them. For their sakes, Sir, tell me where to find an island, tell me where there is solid ground beyond the reach of all this pain."
> "Kappa," said the Master, "for the sake of those people stuck in the middle of the river of being, overwhelmed by death and decay, I will tell you where to find solid ground.
> "There is an island, an island which you cannot go beyond. It is a place of nothingness, a place of non-possession and of non-attachment. It is the total end of death and decay, and this is why I call it Nibbāna [the extinguished, the cool].
> "There are people who, in mindfulness, have realized this and are completely cooled here and now. They do not become slaves working for Māra, for Death; they cannot fall into his power."
> ~ SN 1092-5 (Ven. Saddhatissa trans.)

In English, 'nothingness' can sound like annihilation, like nihilism. But you can also emphasize the 'thingness' so that it becomes 'no-thingness.' So Nibbāna is not a thing that you can find. It is the place of 'no-thingness,' a place of non-possession, a place of non-attachment. It is a place, as Ajahn Chah said, where you experience "the reality of non-grasping."

This anthology, 'The Island,' reflects on this. Its quotes and spiritual teachings are more pointers than definitions or specific directions. Through the use of various teachings, references, scriptures and some of their own experience in practice, Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro are pointing to Nibbāna, pointing out that Nibbāna is a reality that each one of us can know for ourselves – once we recognize non-attachment, once we realize the reality of non-grasping.

Ajahn Sumedho
Amaravati Buddhist Monastery

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AS EDITORS WE HAVE RELIED HEAVILY AND GRATEFULLY upon the ample and competent shoulders of several monastic friends in order to bring this volume of teachings into being.

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In addition to the help provided by those mentioned already, many other friends, monastic and lay, contributed useful feedback and other assistance along the way. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, although severely burdened by illness, wrote a detailed and illuminating four-page reply to a query we had about a text he had translated; and the Sangha at Abhayagiri Monastery, during the times that various drafts of the book have been read out to the community, frequently offered constructive advice and pointed out areas that needed clarification. Karunadhammo Bhikkhu is particularly to be thanked for his helpful suggestions on the ordering of chapters in the first part of the collection.

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photograph of Island Mountain, as are Vince Gibson, who helped greatly with its production and Daniel Barnes, the owner of Bell Springs Hermitage (at 4000 feet on the old stagecoach road between Laytonville and Garberville, in northern California) where the picture was taken. Ruby Grad is to be thanked for the Index.

It is our custom to distribute Dhamma books free of charge to those who are interested in the Teachings. This practice is only made possible through the generosity of individuals who sponsor the production beforehand. Many people have made donations toward the printing costs but we would like to mention the Michiganders (particularly Bill Rittenberg and Sandra Berman) who offered a generous share of the funds that put this book into your hands. May they, and all the others who have so kindly contributed to this book in their various ways, swiftly realize the supreme peace of Nibbāna.

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PĀLI PHONETICS AND PRONUNCIATION

PALI IS THE ORIGINAL scriptural language of Theravādan Buddhism. It was a spoken language closely related to Sanskrit, with no written script of its own. As written forms have emerged, they have always been in the lettering of another language (e.g. Sanskrit, Sinhalese, Burmese, Thai, Roman). Thus the Roman lettering used here is pronounced just as one would expect, with the following clarifications.

Vowels are of two types:

Short	Long
a as in *a*bout	**ā** as in f*a*r
i as in h*i*t	**ī** as in mach*i*ne
u as in p*u*t	**ū** as in tr*u*e
	e as in wh*e*y
	o as in m*o*re

Consonants are mostly as one would expect, with a few additional rules:

c as in an*c*ient (like *ch* but unaspirated)
ṃ, ṅ as *ng* in sa*ng*
ñ as *ny* in ca*ny*on
v rather softer than the English *v;* near *w*

bh, ch, dh, ḍh, gh, jh, kh, ph, th, ṭh
These two-lettered notations with *h* denote an aspirated, airy sound, distinct from the hard, crisp sound of the single consonant. They should be considered as one unit. However, the other combinations with *h*, i.e. *lh, mh, ñh* and *vh* do count as two consonants.
Examples:
th as t in '*t*ongue'. It is never pronounced as in English *'the'*.
ph as *p* in '*p*alate'. It is never pronounced as in English *'photo'*.

ḍ, ḍh, ḷ, ṇ, ṭ, ṭh
These retroflex consonants have no English equivalent. They are sounded by curling the tip of the tongue back against the palate.

ABBREVIATIONS:

D...*Dīgha Nikāya*	The Long Discourses of the Buddha
M...*Majjhima Nikāya*	The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha
S...*Saṃyutta Nikāya*	The Discourses Related by Subject
A...*Anguttara Nikāya*	The Discourses Related by Numbers
Ud...*Udāna*	Inspired Utterances
Iti...*Itivuttaka*	Sayings of the Buddha
SN...*Sutta Nipāta*	A collection of the Buddha's teachings, in verse form
Dhp...*Dhammapada*	A collection of the Buddha's teachings, in verse form
Thag...*Theragāthā*	The Verses of the Elder Monks
Thig...*Therīgāthā*	The Verses of the Elder Nuns
Nid...*Niddesa*	A canonical commentary on the Sutta Nipāta
Vsm...*Visuddhimagga*	The Path of Purification, a commentarial compendium
Miln...*Milindapañha*	The Questions of King Milinda
MV...*Mahāvagga*	The Great Chapter, from the books of monastic discipline

A NOTE ON THE TEXT AND ON TRANSLATION

Chapters 1-12 were compiled by Ajahn Amaro, Chapters 13-20 by Ajahn Pasanno.

Where a translation has been quoted verbatim from another work, the names of the translators have been included with the reference. If there is no named translator then that translation or rendering has been produced by the editors.

Sincere efforts have been made to remain faithful to the scriptures, both in spirit and in letter; should any of these representations of the ancient texts in English fall short in their accuracy we respectfully ask for forgiveness.

To Luang Por Chah,
whose selflessness and wisdom
was able to transform disparate, wandering characters
into dedicated seekers of truth.

And to Luang Por Sumedho,
whose unselfish altruism and perseverance
has so successfully transplanted a branch
of the Sangha in the West.

The effect of the integrity of both these lives
is difficult to imagine,
but it is likely that Luang Por Chah
would be happy to see the results as they are today.

May their examples be a source of inspiration to us all
long into the future.

Seeds:

Names and Symbols

1

WHAT IS IT?

NIBBĀNA (NIRVĀṆA IN SANSKRIT) IS A WORD THAT IS USED to describe an experience. When the heart is free of all obscurations, and is utterly in accord with nature, Ultimate Reality (Dhamma), it experiences perfect peace, joy and contentment. This set of qualities is what Nibbāna describes. The purpose of this book is to outline the particular teachings of the Buddha that point to and illuminate ways that these qualities can be realized. From the Buddhist viewpoint, the realization of Nibbāna is the fulfillment of the highest human potential – a potential that exists in all of us, regardless of nationality or creed.

In contemplating Buddhist terms, and many of the ways of speech employed in this anthology, it is important to bear a couple of things in mind. Firstly, it is a feature of the Buddha's teaching, particularly in the Theravāda scriptures, that the Truth and the way leading to it are often indicated by talking about what they are not rather than what they are.

This mode of expression has a rough parallel in the classical Indian philosophy of the Upaniṣads, in what is known as the principle of 'neti... neti,' meaning 'not this... not this,' – it is the phrase through which the reality of appearances is rejected. In Christian theological language this approach, of referring to what things are not, is called an 'apophatic method,' it is also known as the via negativa and has been used by a number of eminent Christians over the centuries.

The Pali Canon posesses much of the same via negativa flavour and because of this readers have often mistaken it for a nihilistic view on life. Nothing could be further from the truth, but it's easy to see how the mistake could be made, particularly if one comes from a culture commited to life-affirmation, such as is commonly found in the West.

The story has it that shortly after the Buddha's enlightenment he was walking along a road through the Magadhan countryside, in the Ganges Valley, on his way to meet up with the five companions with whom he had practised

austerities before going off alone, to seek the Truth in his own way. Along the road a wandering ascetic, Upaka by name, saw him approaching and was greatly struck by the Buddha's appearance. Not only was he a warrior-noble prince with the regal bearing that came from his upbringing, he was also unusually tall, extraordinarily handsome, was dressed in the rag robes of the ascetic wanderers and he shone with a dazzling radiance. Upaka was moved to enquire:

> 1.1) "Who are you friend? Your face is so clear and bright, your manner is awesome and serene. Surely you must have discovered some great truth – who is your teacher, friend and what is it that you have discovered?"
> The newly-awakened Buddha replied: "I am an All-transcender, an All-knower. I have no teacher. In all the world I alone am fully enlightened. There is none who taught me this – I came to it through my own efforts."
> "Do you mean to say that you claim to have won victory over birth and death?"
> "Indeed friend I am a Victorious One; and now, in this world of the spiritually blind, I go to Benares to beat the drum of Deathlessness."
> "Well, good for you friend," said Upaka and, shaking his head as he went, he left by a different path.
> ~ MV 1.6

The Buddha realized from Upaka's departure that mere declaration of the Truth did not necessarily arouse faith, and was not effective in communicating it to others. So, by the time he reached the Deer Park outside of Benares and had met up with his former companions, he had adopted a much more analytical method (vibhajjavāda). He began his first systematic teaching, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (The Discourse on the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Truth), by explaining the raw truth of the spiritual disease (dukkha, 'unsatisfactoriness, discontent, suffering') and then worked through the cause of the disease (taṇhā, 'craving'), the prognosis (yes, dukkha can indeed cease – nirodha), and finally outlined the medicine (the Noble Eightfold Path – magga). It is not the purpose of this book to go into detail on this formulation. Suffice to say that all that he pronounces about 'the state of health' (to continue the analogy) is that this Middle Way that he has discovered: "brings vision, brings knowledge, leads to calm, to insight, to awakening and to Nibbāna."

This via negativa method is most clearly displayed in the Buddha's second discourse, the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (MV 1.6), also given in the Deer Park at Benares and the teaching which caused the five companions all to realize enlightenment, the liberation of the heart from all delusion and defilement. In this discourse the Buddha uses the search for the self (attā in Pali, ātman in Skt) as his theme, and by using an analytical method he demonstrates that a 'self' cannot be found in relation to any of the factors of body or mind; he then states: "the wise noble disciple becomes dispassionate towards the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness." In this way, he states, the heart is liberated.

This explanation implies that once we let go of what we're not, the nature of what is Real becomes apparent – this was the realization that the Buddha had tried to communicate to Upaka when they met on the high road. And as that Reality is beyond description, it is most appropriate, and least misleading, to let it remain undescribed. This is the essence of the 'way of negation' and will be a repetitive theme throughout the coming pages.*

Secondly, throughout the Buddha's teaching career of forty-five years, most of his attention was placed on offering descriptions of the path. If the goal was spoken of, it was usually in simple, general terms (e.g. at §1.5). However, one of the effects of having placed so much emphasis on the path, is that the Theravāda tradition has tended to speak very little about the nature of the goal – thus often causing that goal, Nibbāna, to disappear from view, or become impossibly vague in concept, or even to be denied as being realizable in this day and age. One of the aims of this book is to collect many of the passages of the Pali Canon where the Buddha does indeed speak about the nature of the goal, elucidating this profound Truth and encouraging its realization.

* * *

ETYMOLOGIES

1.2) Nibbāna: Nirvāṇa (Skt) – Literally 'Extinction' (nir + vā, to cease blowing, to become extinguished); according to the commentaries: 'Freedom from Desire' (nir + vana). Nibbāna constitutes the highest and ultimate goal of all Buddhist aspirations, i.e. absolute extinction of the life-affirming will manifested as Greed, Hate and Delusion, and

*Particularly useful passages on the philosophy behind this principle are to be found in Ch 10, on 'The Unapprehendability of the Enlightened,' and in Ch 11 – especially the passages from 'The Questions of Upasīva'at §11.6-7

convulsively clinging to existence; and therewith also the ultimate and absolute deliverance from all future rebirth, old age, disease and death, from all suffering and misery.
~ Nyanatiloka Bhikkhu, 'Buddhist Dictionary,' p 105

1.3) 'Un-' (nir) + 'binding' (vāna) – To understand the implications of nibbāna in the present life, it is necessary to know something of the way in which fire is described in the Pali Canon. There, fire is said to be caused by the excitation or agitation of the heat property. To continue burning, it must have sustenance (upādāna). Its relationship to its sustenance is one of clinging, dependence, & entrapment. When it goes out, the heat property is no longer agitated, and the fire is said to be freed. Thus the metaphor of nibbāna in this case would have implications of calming together with release from dependencies, attachments, & bondage. This in turn suggests that of all the attempts to describe the etymology of the word nibbāna, the closest is the one Buddhaghosa proposed in 'The Path of Purification': Un- (nir) + binding (vāna): Unbinding.
~ Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 'The Mind Like Fire Unbound,' p 2

* * *

DEFINITIONS

1.4) "Before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened bodhisatta, being myself subject to birth, aging, ailment, death, sorrow and defilement, I sought after what was also subject to these things. Then I thought: 'Why, being myself subject to birth, aging, ailment, death, sorrow and defilement, do I seek after what is also subject to these things? Suppose, being myself subject to these things, seeing danger in them, I sought after the unborn, unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled supreme release from bondage, Nibbāna?'"
~ M 26.13

1.5) "That which is the exhaustion of greed, of hate, and of delusion, is called Nibbāna."
~ S 38.1

1.6) “This truly is the most peaceful and refined, that is to say, the stilling of all formations, the forsaking of all acquisitions and every substratum of rebirth, the fading away of craving, cessation, Nibbāna.”
~ A 10.60

1.7) “The remainderless fading, cessation, Nibbāna
comes with the utter ending of all craving.
When a bhikkhu reaches Nibbāna thus through not clinging,
there is no renewal of being;
Māra has been vanquished and the battle gained,
since one who is Such has outstripped all being.”
~ Ud 3.10

The term ‘Such’ here is a translation of the Pali word ‘tādi’ – it is an epithet occasionally used for the enlightened. It will be seen again at §§6.7 & 6.8, in passages from Ñāṇananda Bhikkhu.

1.8) “Enraptured with lust (rāga), enraged with anger (dosa), blinded by delusion (moha), overwhelmed, with mind ensnared, people aim at their own ruin, at the ruin of others, at the ruin of both, and they experience mental pain and grief. But if lust, anger and delusion are given up, one aims neither at one’s own ruin, nor at the ruin of others, nor at the ruin of both, and they experience no mental pain and grief. Thus is Nibbāna visible in this life, immediate, inviting, attractive, and comprehensible to the wise.”
~ A 3.55

1.9) “Just as a rock of one solid mass remains unshaken by the wind, even so neither visible forms, nor sounds, nor odours, nor tastes, nor bodily impressions, neither the desired nor the undesired, can cause such a one to waver. Steadfast is their mind, gained is deliverance.”
~ A 6.55

1.10) “Cessation of greed, of hatred and of delusion is the Unformed, the Unconditioned (Asaṅkhata)

the End,	(Anata)
the Taintless,	(Anāsava)
the Truth,	(Sacca)
the Other Shore,	(Pāra)
the Subtle,	(Nipuṇa)
the Very Hard to See,	(Sududdasa)
the Unweakening,	(Ajajjara)
the Everlasting,	(Dhuva)
the Undisintegrating,	(Apalokita)
the Invisible,	(Anidassana)
the Undiversified,	(Nippapañca)
Peace,	(Santa)
the Deathless,	(Amata)
the Supreme Goal,	(Paṇīta)
the Blest,	(Siva)
Safety,	(Khema)
Exhaustion of Craving,	(Taṇhākkhaya)
the Wonderful,	(Acchariya)
the Marvellous,	(Abbhuta)
Non-distress,	(Anītika)
the Naturally Non-distressed,	(Anītika-dhamma)
Nibbāna,	
Non-affliction (Unhostility),	(Abyāpajjha)
Fading of Lust,	(Virāga)
Purity,	(Suddhi)
Freedom,	(Mutti)
Independence of Reliance,	(Anālayo)
the Island,	(Dīpa)
the Shelter,	(Leṇa)
the Harbour,	(Tāṇa)
the Refuge,	(Saraṇa)
the Beyond,	(Parāyana)."

~ S 43.1-44 (edited, Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu trans.)

In addition to these epithets, there are numerous others employed by the Buddha throughout the Pali Canon, for example:

The Everlasting	(Accanta)
The Unmade	(Akatā)

The Endless	(Ananta)
The Cessation of Suffering	(Dukkhakkhaya)
The Freedom from Longing	(Annāsa)
The Uncreated	(Asaṅkhāra)
The Beyond	(Para)
Deliverance	(Mokkha)
Cessation	(Nirodha)
The Absolute	(Kevala)
The Law	(Pada)
The Deathless	(Accuta)
The Lasting	(Akkhara)
Release	(Vimutta)
Liberation	(Vimutti)
Total Completion	(Apavagga)
Freedom from Bondage	(Yogakkhema)
Stillness	(Santi)
Purity	(Visuddhi)
Allayment	(Nibbuti)
The Unborn	(Ajāta)
The Unoriginated	(Abhūta)
Freedom From Lust	(Vītarāga)
The Destruction of the Passions	(Khīṇāsava)
The Unconditioned Element	(Asaṅkhatadhātu)
The Standstill of the Cycle of Existence	(Vivaṭṭa)

These terms are all ways of referring to the same essential and ineffable quality. Such a variety of expression was needed since even the Buddha acknowledged that it was hard to convey the realization of Truth in words; he describes a time shortly after his enlightenment:

> 1.11) "I considered: 'This Dhamma that I have realized is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced only by the wise.' But this generation delights in worldliness (ālaya), takes delight in worldliness, rejoices in worldliness. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, namely, specific conditionality (idapaccayatā), dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). And it is hard to see this truth,

> namely, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments (upadhi), the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna. If I were to teach the Dhamma, others would not understand me, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me."
> ~ MV 1.5, S 6.1, M 26.19

This insight of the Buddha was deeply prescient, for indeed worldly people frequently found his teachings unacceptable (for example in his encounter with Upaka, at §1.1, and in the passages §§5.21-26). Fortunately, shortly after this thought formed in the mind of the Buddha, he was persuaded to teach, and did so freely from then on. He travelled widely through northeast India (Jambudīpa) and spoke on invitation to whomsoever was interested to hear his teaching.

As he travelled and met people, the Buddha was concerned to get his message across as effectively as possible. In order to do this he employed a variety of ways of speaking. One of his styles of expression was the juxtaposition of perhaps half a dozen nouns or adjectives (such as various epithets for Nibbāna) with overlapping or mutually resonant meanings – examples of this style can be be seen both in the passage at §1.11 (in the second to last sentence) and in §1.13, para.2. There are several different reasons for such a manner of speaking.

Firstly, it offers a constellation of meanings so that, out of the related words, the listener would be more likely to receive at least one that reached their heart. The Buddha almost always used a variety of terms, rather than defining a quality with a single standard expression.

Secondly (and this was the theory of Ven. Ānanda Maitreya, a knowledge-able and highly respected Sri Lankan elder), because the Buddha was speaking to highly variegated audiences – not only people from all four castes, from illiterate farmers to erudite pandits, but also people from many regions and speaking many dialects – he needed to put out a variety of terms, otherwise large sections of the audience might miss the meaning of what was being expounded.

As a teacher, the Buddha excelled in taking into account the faculties, dispositions and conditioning of his listeners, and on that basis alone Ven. Ānanda Maitreya's theory makes a lot of sense.

The effort to teach the Dhamma and to describe Nibbāna effectively has continued to be a challenging task, from the time of the Buddha up until the present. Nevertheless, over the years, various wise elders and commentators have formulated explanations and similes that have helped to convey the profundity and simplicity of these truths to their listeners and readers.

One such classical exposition is to be found in 'The Questions of King Milinda' – a text that derives from the time of Greek rule in northern India, following the invasion by Alexander. The 'Milinda' of the title is known to European history as 'Menander,' a Greek king who ruled in northwest India from 163 to 150 BCE. The collection is made up of dialogues between the spiritually interested king and the Buddhist monk Nāgasena. Here are some of the king's questions and the responses he received.

> 1.12) "Reverend Nāgasena, you are continually talking about Nibbāna. Now is it possible to make clear the form or figure or age or dimensions of this Nibbāna, either by an illustration or by a reason or by a cause or by a method?"
> "Nibbāna, great king, is unlike anything else; it is impossible."
> "This, Reverend Nāgasena, I cannot admit, – that if Nibbāna really exists, it should be impossible to make known its form or figure or age or dimensions, either by an illustration or by a reason or by a cause or by a method. Tell me why."
> "Let be, great king; I will tell you why."
>
> "Is there, great king, such a thing as the great ocean?"
> "Yes, Reverend Sir, there is such a thing as the great ocean."
> "If, great king, some man were to ask you: 'Great king, how much water is there in the great ocean? And how many living creatures dwell in the great ocean?' If, great king, some man were to ask you this question, how would you answer him?"
> "If, Reverend Sir, some man were to ask me: 'Great king, how much water is there in the great ocean? And how many living creatures dwell in the great ocean?' I, Reverend Sir, should say this to him: 'The question you ask, Master man, is a question you have no right to ask; that is no question for anybody to ask; that question must be set aside. The hair-splitters have never gone into the subject of the great ocean. It is impossible to measure the water in the great ocean, or to count the living beings that make their abode there.' That is the reply I should give him, Reverend Sir."
> "But, great king, if the great ocean really exists, why should you give him such a reply as that? Surely you ought to measure and count, and then tell him: "There is so much water in the great

ocean, and there are so many living beings dwelling in the great ocean!"

"It's impossible, Reverend Sir. That question isn't a fair one."

"Great king, just as, although the great ocean exists, it is impossible to measure the water or to count the living beings that make their abode there, precisely so, great king, although Nibbāna really exists, it is impossible to make clear the form or figure or age or dimensions of Nibbāna, either by an illustration or by a reason or by a cause or by a method. Great king, a person possessed of magical power, possessed of mastery over mind, could estimate the quantity of water in the great ocean and the number of living beings dwelling there; but that person possessed of magical power, possessed of mastery over mind, would never be able to make clear the form or figure or age or dimensions of Nibbāna, either by an illustration or by a reason or by a cause or by a method."

"Reverend Nāgasena, granted that Nibbāna is unalloyed bliss, and that it is impossible to make clear its form or figure or age or dimensions, either by an illustration or by a reason or by a cause or by a method. But, Reverend Sir, has Nibbāna any qualities in common with other things, – something that might serve as an illustration or example?"

"In the matter of form, great king, it has not. But in the matter of qualities, there are some illustrations and examples which might be employed."

"Good, Reverend Nāgasena! And that I may receive, even with reference to the qualities of Nibbāna, some little light on a single point, speak quickly! Quench the fever in my heart! Subdue it with the cool, sweet breezes of your words!"

"Just as the lotus is not polluted by water, so also Nibbāna is not polluted by any of the Depravities.

"Just as water is cool and quenches fever, so also Nibbāna is cool and quenches every one of the Depravities.

But again further, – water subdues the thirst of the races of men and animals when they are tired and weary and thirsty and overcome with the heat. Precisely so Nibbāna subdues the thirst

of Craving for the Pleasures of Sense, of Craving for Existence, of Craving for Power and Wealth.

“Just as medicine is the refuge of living beings oppressed by poison, so also Nibbāna is the refuge of living beings oppressed by the poison of the Depravities.
But again further, – medicine puts an end to bodily ills. Precisely so Nibbāna puts an end to all sufferings.

“Just as... the great ocean is vast, boundless, fills not up for all of the streams [that flow into it]. Precisely so Nibbāna is vast, boundless, fills not up for all of the living beings [that pass thereunto].
But again further, – the great ocean is all in blossom, as it were, with the flowers of its waves, – mighty, various, unnumbered. Precisely so Nibbāna is all in blossom, as it were, with the Flowers of Purity, Knowledge, and Deliverance, – mighty, various, unnumbered.

“Just as food is the support of life of all living beings, so also Nibbāna, once realized, is the support of life, for it destroys old age and death.
But again further, – food is the source of the beauty of all living beings. Precisely so Nibbāna, once realized, is the source of the beauty of the virtues of all living beings...

“Just as space is not produced, does not age, does not suffer death, does not pass out of existence, does not come into existence, cannot be forcibly handled, cannot be carried away by thieves, rests on nothing, is the pathway of birds, presents no obstacles, is endless, – so also Nibbāna is not produced, does not age, does not suffer death, does not pass out of existence, does not come into existence, cannot be forcibly handled, cannot be carried away by thieves, rests on nothing, is the pathway of the Noble, presents no obstacles, is endless.

“Just as... the wishing-jewel provokes a smile of satisfaction. Precisely so Nibbāna provokes a smile of satisfaction...

> "Just as a mountain-peak is exceedingly lofty, so also Nibbāna is exceedingly lofty.
> But again further, – a mountain-peak is immovable. Precisely so Nibbāna is immovable.
> But again further, – a mountain-peak is difficult of ascent.
> Precisely so Nibbāna is difficult of ascent for the Depravities, one and all.
> But again further, – on a mountain-peak seeds, – any and all, – will not grow. Precisely so, in Nibbāna the Depravities, – any and all, – will not grow."
>
> "Good, Reverend Nāgasena! It is even so! I agree absolutely!"
> ~ Miln 315-323 (abridged, E.W. Burlingame trans.)

In employing such an abundance of graphic similes, the Venerable Nāgasena is following firmly in the footsteps of the Buddha, for throughout his teaching career this was a device that he frequently used to convey a point and help it to lodge firmly in the listener's memory. Another such method he employed was the formulation of numerated lists of qualities – e.g. the Four Noble Truths, the Three Characteristics, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment etc. – this system is also a powerful aid in committing the teachings to memory and then assisting in their retrieval.

As a summary of this section on the theme of definitions, here is a brief but comprehensive description of the meaning of 'Nibbāna' by one of the most eminent translators of Pali scriptures in current times.

> 1.13) The state that supervenes when ignorance and craving have been uprooted is called Nibbāna (Sanskrit, Nirvāṇa), and no conception in the Buddha's teaching has proved so refractory to conceptual pinning down as this one. In a way such elusiveness is only to be expected, since Nibbāna is described precisely as "profound, hard to see and hard to understand, ... unattainable by mere reasoning" (M 26.19). Yet in this same passage the Buddha also says that Nibbāna is to be experienced by the wise and in the suttas he gives enough indications of its nature to convey some idea of its desirability. The Pali Canon offers sufficient evidence to dispense with the opinion of some interpreters that Nibbāna is sheer annihilation; even the more sophisticated view that Nibbāna is merely the destruction of

defilements and the extinction of existence cannot stand up under scrutiny. Probably the most compelling testimony against that view is the well-known passage from the Udāna that` declares with reference to Nibbāna that "there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned," the existence of which makes possible "escape from the born, become, made and conditioned" (Ud 8.3). The Majjhima Nikāya characterises Nibbāna in similar ways. It is "the unborn, unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled supreme security from bondage," which the Buddha attained to on the night of his enlightenment (M 26.18). Its pre-eminent reality is affirmed by the Buddha when he calls Nibbāna the supreme foundation of truth, whose nature is undeceptive and which ranks as the supreme noble truth (M 140.26). Nibbāna cannot be perceived by those who live in lust and hate, but it can be seen with the arising of spiritual vision, and by fixing the mind upon it in the depths of meditation, the disciple can attain the destruction of the taints [āsava – also variously translated as 'outflows' or 'corruptions'] (M 26.19, M 75.24, M 64.9).

The Buddha does not devote many words to a philosophical definition of Nibbāna. One reason is that Nibbāna, being unconditioned, transcendent, and supramundane, does not easily lend itself to definition in terms of concepts that are inescapably tied to the conditioned, manifest, and mundane. Another is that the Buddha's objective is the practical one of leading beings to release from suffering, and thus his principal approach to the characterisation of Nibbāna is to inspire the incentive to attain it and to show what must be done to accomplish this. To show Nibbāna as desirable, as the aim of striving, he describes it as the highest bliss, as the supreme state of sublime peace, as the ageless, deathless, and sorrowless, as the supreme security from bondage. To show what must be done to attain Nibbāna, to indicate that the goal implies a definite task, he describes it as the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion (M 26.19). Above all, Nibbāna is the cessation of suffering, and for those who seek an end to suffering such a designation is enough to beckon them towards the path.

~ Bhikkhu Bodhi, 'Introduction to the Majjhima Nikāya,' pp 31-2

Finally, as the term ‘Nibbāna’ has a somewhat broad definition, over the years there have often been misunderstandings and misuses of the word. Here is just one example from the time of the Buddha; it harks back both to the imagery (mentioned after §1.1 above) of dukkha as the fundamental spiritual disease and to its cessation, i.e. the establishment of perfect spiritual health, through the medicine of the Noble Eightfold Path.

> 1.14) “But, Māgandiya, when you heard that said [about Nibbāna as ‘the greatest health’] by earlier wanderers in the tradition of the teachers, what is that health, what is that Nibbāna?”
> When this was said, the wanderer Māgandiya rubbed his own limbs with his hands and said: “This is that health, Master Gotama, this is that Nibbāna; for I am now healthy and happy and nothing afflicts me...”
> “So too, Māgandiya, the wanderers of other sects are blind and visionless. They do not know health, they do not see Nibbāna, yet they utter this stanza thus:
> ‘The greatest of all gains is health,
> Nibbāna is the greatest bliss.’
> “This stanza was uttered by the earlier Accomplished Ones, Fully Enlightened Ones, thus:
> ‘The greatest of all gains is health,
> Nibbāna is the greatest bliss,
> The eightfold path is the best of paths
> For it leads safely to the Deathless.’
> “Now it has gradually become current among ordinary people. And although this body, Māgandiya, is a disease, a tumour, a dart, a calamity, and an affliction, referring to this body you say: ‘This is that health, Master Gotama, this is that Nibbāna.’ You do not have that noble vision, Māgandiya, by means of which you might know health and see Nibbāna.”
> ~ M 75.19-21, (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The various definitions and descriptions included so far may give you some idea of both the difficulty of making such definitions and also the range of approaches that the Buddha used to allude to this highest of spiritual potentials. The next chapter will explore in more detail the central metaphor that the Buddha employed in describing this ultimate spiritual goal.

2

FIRE, HEAT AND COOLNESS

> 2.1) SUMMARIES OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS rarely convey how much use he made of simile and metaphor. Many people know that nirvāṇa/nibbāna means 'going out' (like a flame), but probably few of them know, or perhaps even ask themselves, what is going out? The Buddha had a simple, urgent message to convey, and was ingenious in finding ever new terms and analogies by which to convey it. The suttas are full of his inventiveness. When he resorted to figurative or other indirect modes of expression, this is called pariyāya, literally 'a way round'; it is 'a way of putting things.'
> ~ Richard Gombrich, 'Metaphor, Allegory, Satire,' in 'How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings,' p 65

Over and over again the Buddha uses the images of heat and fire to indicate the states of dissatisfaction and suffering (dukkha) induced by passion, greed, hatred and delusion in all their multifarious forms. Similarly, he uses the images of shade and coolness to indicate the state of pure transcendence. It is worth noting that, generally speaking, the Buddha used common household terms and similes to describe even abstruse concepts and qualities.

He was not prone to 'blinding with science' – as was apparently the custom of many of his contemporaries – but was instead concerned to convey the truth in ways that all interested people could understand. The word 'nibbāna' itself seems to have been in common usage: Ajahn Buddhadāsa, a highly revered contemporary Thai meditation master and scholar, has said that the word was often used in referring to cooking, that once rice had been boiled, one needed to let it 'nibbāna' for a while so that it would drop to the right temperature to eat.

It's also important, perhaps, to bear in mind that the Buddha taught in

India, a land of blazing heat, and in such environments 'coolness' can easily gather to it an aura of intrinsic goodness and attractiveness (this notwithstanding the quest for tapas, 'spiritual heat,' by Vedic-inspired ascetics, especially through their practices of self-mortification).

In the northern regions where the English language originated, 'warmth' takes on a similar aura of desirability; the source of oppression and danger is not the merciless sun but the chill bitterness of winter – "Through the dark cold and the empty desolation..." as T.S. Eliot has it in East Coker. Accordingly, it is useful to take into account one's own conditioning when exploring and considering the terms and images which appear in this book and in Theravāda scripture in general.

Since Nibbāna is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice, it's arguable that it should be regarded as the most significant of terms in the Pali Canon. The Buddha once referred to it as the "supreme noble truth" (M 140.26), it is therefore worthwhile to take a little time to explore this particular pariyāya; to investigate why the Buddha chose this specific term to refer to the culmination of the spiritual life, where the term came from, what connotations it had, and indeed (to follow Professor Gombrich's question) to look at what it is that is 'going out.'

What is immediately clear is that the term 'Nibbāna' refers to the realms of heat and coolness, to fire and its quenching. Here are some passages from Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu's writings – including his excellent treatise on Nibbāna, 'The Mind Like Fire Unbound' – which address this same area. In 'The Mind Like Fire Unbound,' Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu particularly notes the two contexts in which the Buddha uses the fire analogy and the different points the Buddha draws from that analogy depending on the context – i.e. whether he is talking to non-Buddhist brahmins or to his own followers.

> 2.2) Nibbāna – which literally means the extinguishing of a fire – derives from the way the physics of fire was viewed at his [the Buddha's] time. As fire burned, it was seen as clinging to its fuel in a state of entrapment and agitation. When it went out, it let go of its fuel, growing calm and free. Thus when the Indians of his time saw a fire going out, they did not feel that they were watching extinction. Rather, they were seeing a metaphorical lesson in how freedom could be attained by letting go.
> ~ Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 'The Wings to Awakening,' p 6

> 2.3) The image of an extinguished fire carried no connotations of annihilation for the early Buddhists. Rather, the aspects

> of fire that to them had significance for the mind-fire analogy are these: Fire, when burning, is in a state of agitation, dependence, attachment, & entrapment – both clinging & being stuck to its sustenance. Extinguished, it becomes calm, independent, indeterminate, & unattached: It lets go of its sustenance and is released. This same nexus of events, applied to the workings of the mind, occurs repeatedly in Canonical passages describing the attainment of the goal.
> ~ Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 'The Mind Like Fire Unbound,' p 41

It is in the spiritual and cultural context described by the above-quoted passages on fire that we should consider the Buddha's choice of terminology when he coined the phrase 'the three fires' for passion, hatred and delusion (rāga, dosa and moha). Furthermore, he chose these terms very early on in his dispensation – traditionally said to be at the time of his third discourse, 'The Fire Sermon.'

Even though, in this following passage, Richard Gombrich does not make reference to the Vedic notion that fire is latent everywhere, he nonetheless has some very insightful perspectives on the symbolic role of fire in India, particularly from the perspective of the brahmin priesthood.

> 2.4) Nirvāṇa is part of an extended metaphorical structure which embraces Enlightenment and its opposite. What has to go out is the set of three fires: passion (or greed), hatred and delusion. According to tradition, the Buddha introduced the concept of these three fires in his third sermon (MV 1.21 = S 35.28). This sermon is known in English as the Fire Sermon, but in Pali it is called the Āditta-pariyāya, 'The way of putting things as being on fire.' The sermon begins with the bald and startling statement, "Everything, O monks, is on fire." The Buddha then explains what he means by 'everything.' It is all our faculties (the five senses plus the mind), their objects and operations and the feelings they give rise to. All these are on fire with the fires of passion, hatred and delusion.
> I have shown in an earlier article (Gombrich, 1990:17-20) that the fires number three because the Buddha was alluding to a set of three fires which the brahmin householder was committed to keeping alight and tending daily, so that they came to symbolise

life in the world, life as a family man. This is made crystal clear in a sermon (A 7.44) in which the Buddha first juxtaposes the three sacrificial fires with the fires of passion, hatred and delusion, and then, with the aid of puns, metaphorically reinterprets the former: the eastern fire, āhavanīya in Sanskrit, he says stands for one's parents; the western (gārhapatya) fire for one's household and dependents; the southern (dakṣiṇāgni) for holy men (renunciates and brahmins) worthy to receive offerings. It is in this sense, he tells a fat brahmin, that a householder should tend the fires: by supporting *people.*

Later generations of Buddhists had no reason to be interested in Vedic brahmins or in the Buddha's debate with them, so the origin of this metaphor was forgotten. So far as I know, it is not to be found in the commentaries. In the Mahāyāna, the metaphor was so thoroughly forgotten that passion, hatred and delusion came to be known as the three poisons...

Since even the core of the fire metaphor was thus early forgotten by Buddhist tradition, it is not surprising that its extensions were forgotten too. The word 'upādāna' has both a concrete and an abstract meaning. In the abstract it means attachment, grasping; in this sense it is much used in Buddhist dogmatics. Concretely, it means that which fuels this process. The P.E.D. s.v.: '(lit. that [material] substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive and going), fuel, supply, provision.' So when the context deals with fire it simply means fuel. The five khandhā, from form to consciousness, are often referred to in the texts as the upādāna-kkhandhā, and this is usually translated something like 'the aggregates of grasping.' While not wrong, this translation has lost the metaphor.

In my opinion it is clear that the term 'khandha' too was a part of the fire metaphor. I would trace it back to a small sutta... the sermon about the burden at Saṃyutta Nikāya Khandha-vagga, sutta 22 = S 22.22. Like most of these short sermons in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, this has no narrative context. The Buddha simply begins by saying: "Monks, I shall teach you the burden, the bearer of the burden, the taking up of the burden and the putting down of the burden." He is expounding a metaphor. The burden, he says, is what we may call the five upādāna-kkhandhā;

> he then names the standard five, from matter to consciousness, calling each an 'upādāna-kkhandha.' Each is being metaphorically called a bundle of fuel. The normal fuel was firewood, and we can, if we like, extend the image to being one of the brahmin student (brahmacārin), one of whose daily duties was to collect the firewood to feed the sacred fires...
> There is a short text a little later in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, at S 22.61, which states that the five khandha are on fire (āditta), so that one should stop caring for them. I wonder whether this was not the original form of the metaphor of 'being on fire': the experiences of the unenlightened are like five bundles of firewood which are on fire. That would make them very uncomfortable to carry! Indeed, I wonder whether these two short texts, S 22.22 and S 22.61, were not originally together.
> ~ Richard Gombrich, 'How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings,' pp 65-8

Another influence on the society within which the Buddha was living and teaching, along with the brahmins and their tending of the fires, was the presence of the samaṇas – the varieties of wandering yogis and ascetics amongst whom the Buddha counted himself and his disciples (more often than not he was known by the epithet 'the Samaṇa Gotama' by those who were not his followers). Along with putting a damper on the brahmins, and encouraging the three fires to be put out rather than tended and kept alive, he also met the principal focus of the yogic tradition of his time head on and doused their image of the spiritual goal as well.

> 2.5) For ṛṣis [ascetic yogis] the pivotal word was tapas, 'heat.' For the Buddha it was Nirvāṇa, 'extinction' [coolness]. Perfect correspondence, poles apart. Inversion. In the land they lived in, extinction was thought of as fire going home, withdrawing into its dark dwelling.
> ~ Roberto Calasso, 'Ka,' pp 369-70

> 2.6) Tapas: Heat; ardor; from the Indo-European root tap-, which gives the Latin tepeo. Long translated with a range of terms (austérités, penance, Kasteiung, ascèse... Brütung [Deussen]), ... tapas means at once the cosmic heat and the heat within the mind, that which broods, in the sense of incubates.
> ~ ibid, p 435

> 2.7) Tapas: Ascetic heat or ardor; a kind of psychic explosion that leads in the case of the gods to the creation of universes, and with humans to the acquisition of such powers that even the gods tremble before them. Shiva as the supreme Ascetic sustains the universe through his tapas.
> ~ Gita Mehta, 'A River Sutra,' p 290

> 2.8) Through their endurance the pilgrims hope to generate the heat, the tapas, that links men to the energy of the universe, as the Narmada River is thought to link mankind to the energy of Shiva.
> ~ ibid, p 8

The Buddha countered the concept of tapas (heat), as the most desirable spiritual quality, with his extolling of Nibbāna (coolness). In a single gesture, as with the encouragement to put out the three fires, he thus caught the attention of his listeners through the employment of shock tactics – what an audacious and heretical way to speak! He indicated how his teaching varied from the traditions that they had inherited from elsewhere, and, most importantly, he provided fresh metaphors for the goal of the spiritual life and the path leading to it: put out the three fires of passion, hatred and delusion and you will arrive at the utter spiritual plenitude of Nibbāna – unshakeable and perfect peace.

Having said that, it is also important to recognize that all analogies are partial and that the Buddha didn't always refer to tapas in a pejorative way, e.g. in the Ovāda Pāṭimokkha, a teaching given to 1250 arahant disciples, the Buddha's opening words were "Patient endurance is the supreme austerity (tapas)," referring to its central and beneficial role in the spiritual life. Similarly, as it's pointed out at §§2.2 & 2.3, in reference to ancient Indian physics, the extinction of a fire could be seen as its 'release' and thus carry positive connotations as well.

Nevertheless, in common understanding and expressions of the time, the brahmins and fire-worshippers tending their flames, together with the ascetic yogis endeavouring to generate as much psychic 'heat' as possible, form the context within which the Buddha formulated these central metaphors of his teaching. This shift of perspective, from fire and heat to coolness, is probably best evidenced in the very first – and most famous – instance that he used such expressions: The Fire Sermon.

> 2.9) On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Gayā,

> at Gayā's Head, together with a thousand bhikkhus. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus:
>
> "Bhikkhus, all is burning. And what, bhikkhus, is the all that is burning? The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning, and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition – whether pleasant or painful or neutral – that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of passion, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, aging, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair, I say.
>
> "The ear is burning... The nose... The tongue... The body... The mind is burning... and whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition – whether pleasant or painful or neutral that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of passion, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, aging, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair, I say.
>
> "Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the wise, noble disciple experiences disenchantment towards the eye, towards forms, towards eye-consciousness, towards eye-contact, towards whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition – whether pleasant or painful or neutral; experiences disenchantment towards the ear... the nose... the tongue... the body... towards the mind... towards whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition... Experiencing disenchantment, they become dispassionate. Through dispassion the heart is liberated. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: 'It is liberated.' They understand: 'Birth is finished, the holy life has been lived out, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming into any state of being.'"
>
> This is what the Blessed One said. Inspired, those bhikkhus delighted in the Blessed One's words. And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of those thousand bhikkhus were liberated from the outflows (āsava) through not clinging.
>
> ~ S 35.28, MV 1.21

The whole teaching here hinges upon two simple words: "Seeing thus" – evaṃ passaṃ. Given sufficient clarity of vision – that is, insight into the true nature of

things – the fires of passion, hatred and delusion can be completely cooled and extinguished. It's also important to keep in mind the 'Indian view' of a fire going out – whereas for the occidentally conditioned mind an extinguished fire might imply death and darkness, in the spiritual culture of the Buddha's India, the fires of passion, hatred and delusion going out would reveal the presence of the Dhamma, characterized by purity, radiance and peacefulness (as at §12.2). Not only is the Fire Sermon of great significance because of the extinguishing of the three fires by the power of wisdom, but it is also accorded great weight by virtue of the fact that, during its delivery, all one thousand listeners were enlightened.

Even if the reader doubts the historical veracity of such claims, it is nonetheless significant that this is the highest number of people to be liberated through the hearing of a single discourse of the Buddha, as recorded in the scriptures. The event is thereby charged with an added measure of renown.

Here are some more examples of the usage of fire symbolism, both by the Buddha and a number of his disciples, as found in the Pali scriptures.

> 2.10) This was said by the Lord…
> "Bhikkhus, there are these three fires. What three? The fire of passion, the fire of hate, the fire of delusion. These, bhikkhus, are the three fires."
>
> "The fire of lust burns mortals
> drunk on sensual pleasure;
> the fire of hate burns the malevolent
> who kill other living beings.
>
> "Delusion burns the bewildered,
> unaware of the Noble Dhamma –
> unaware of these three fires,
> they delight in self-identification.
>
> "Unfree from the bonds of Māra
> they swell the ranks of hell,
> the hordes of the animal realm,
> the asuras and the ghosts.
>
> "But those sincerely practising
> the Dhamma day and night,

consider the body's ugliness,
and quell the fire of lust.

"Those Noble Ones, through kindness,
put out the fire of hate,
and snuff delusion's fire by
wisdom leading to penetration.

"Having quenched these fires,
those wise ones,
tireless night and day,
attain final Nibbāna
and comprehend the realm of pain.

"These noble seers, the Masters,
wise ones who truly know,
indeed have seen the end of birth –
no more becoming will they experience."
~ Iti 93

This next passage involves our first encounter, in these pages, with Vacchagotta – a character whose persistent enquiries gave rise to some of the Buddha's most memorable teachings.

2.11) "The Samaṇa Gotama... declares the rebirth of a disciple who has passed away and died thus: 'That one was reborn here, that one was reborn there.' But in the case of a disciple who was a person of the highest kind, a supreme person, one who has attained the supreme attainment, when that disciple has passed away and died, he does not declare the rebirth thus: 'That one was reborn here, that one was reborn there.' Rather he declares of them: 'They cut off craving, severed the fetter and, by completely breaking through conceit, they have made an end of suffering.'

"There was perplexity in me, Master Gotama, there was doubt: How is the Dhamma of the Samaṇa Gotama to be understood here?"

"It is fitting for you to be perplexed, Vaccha, it is fitting fot you to doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about a perplexing matter.

> I declare Vaccha, rebirth for one fuelled by clinging, not for one unfuelled by clinging. Just as a fire burns with fuel, but not without fuel so, Vaccha, I declare rebirth for one with fuel, not for one without fuel." (Sa-upādānassa khvāhaṃ Vaccha upapattiṃ paññāpemi no anupādānassa.)

There is a deliberate double meaning here, with 'upādāna' meaning both 'fuel' and subjective 'clinging.'

> "But, Master Gotama, when a flame is flung by the wind and goes a far distance, what do you say its fuel is on that occasion?"
> "Vaccha, when a flame is flung by the wind and goes a far distance, I say that it is fuelled by the wind. The wind, Vaccha, is its fuel on that occasion."
> "And, Master Gotama, when a being has laid down this body and has not yet been reborn in another body, what does Master Gotama say is the 'fuel' on that occasion?"
> "Vaccha, when a being has laid down this body and has not yet been reborn in another body, I say that craving is the fuel. Craving, Vaccha, is the fuel at that time." (Tam ahaṃ taṇhūpādānaṃ vadāmi.)
> ~ S 44.9

> 2.12) Sumedhā:
> "When the Deathless exists
> why court sense pleasures –
> like burning fevers?
> Every sensual delight
> is on fire, ablaze – seething.
>
> "When a firebrand
> in your hand is alight,
> let go
> and you won't get burned.
>
> Sensuality is that firebrand:
> those who don't let go get burned."
> ~ Thig 504-6

> 2.13) "Suppose, bhikkhus, a person would drop a blazing grass torch into a thicket of dry grass. If that individual does not quickly extinguish it with their hands and feet, the creatures living in the grass and wood will meet with calamity and disaster. So too, if any samaṇa or brahmin does not quickly abandon, dispel, obliterate, and extinguish the unwholesome perceptions that have arisen in them, they dwell in suffering in this very life, with vexation, despair, and fever; and with the breakup of the body, after death, a bad destination may be expected for them.
> "Suppose, bhikkhus, a person would drop a blazing grass torch into a thicket of dry grass. If that individual quickly extinguishes it with their hands and feet, the creatures living in the grass and wood will not meet with calamity and disaster. So too, if any samaṇa or brahmin quickly abandons, dispels, obliterates, and extinguishes the unwholesome perceptions that have arisen in them, they dwell happily in this very life, without vexation, despair, and fever; and with the breakup of the body, after death, a good destination may be expected for them."
> ~ S 14.12

This chapter closes with a collection of verses from some of the elder nuns and monks of the Buddha's time. We start with expressions of the coarse end of the fire analogy, the flames of passion, and conclude with the most refined – the going out of a flame as symbolic of utter release, the heart's true and joyful liberation, the transformation of all mental heat and flame into the pure light of Dhamma and equally into the coolness of Nibbāna.

> 2.14) Vaṅgīsa:
> "I burn with lust
> my mind on fire –
> please, Master Gotama,
> show compassion,
> how do I put it out?"
>
> "Warped perceptions
> are what keep your mind on fire.
> See through the glamour
> igniting lust,

see all compounded things
as other, unappealing –
not-self.

"Let your mountainous lust
be cooled
of the endless
burning."
~ Thag 1223-4

2.15) Sumedhā:
"There is this: beyond ageing,
this: beyond death,
this: the unageing, undying state;
this: free from grieving,
from all animosity –
unobstructed, unhindered,
free from all fear –
not burning."
~ Thig 512

2.16) To Hemaka:
"When there is the dispelling
of passion and desire
for things that are cherished –
pleasant sights and sounds,
thoughts and feelings –
the Deathless state,
Nibbāna
appears.

Mindful
in the here and now,
those who know this
are forever calmed –
they have
crossed over
beyond

the world."
~ SN 1086-7

2.17) Paṭācārā:
"'When they plough their lands
and sow the earth with seed,
nourishing wives and children,
the lay-folk gain rewards.

"'I've cultivated virtue well –
followed my teacher's rule –
I'm not proud or lazy
why haven't I found Nibbāna?'

"Washing my feet, I watched the water
flowing from high to low –
my mind was concentrated,
reined in like a noble stallion.

"Then taking up a lamp
and entering my hut,
I checked the bedding,
sat down on the bed.

"Lifting a needle
I doused
the burning wick with it:

like the departing flame
the heart was then released."
~ Thig 112-16

Our final verse was uttered by Ven. Anuruddha, one of the arahant disciples of the Buddha; appropriately he gave voice to it immediately after the Parinibbāna, the final passing away of the Master.

2.18) Anuruddha:
"The tides of breath all ceased –

> unstirred,
> with steadfast heart the Sage,
> the one of vision,
> inclining
> to Nibbāna
> came to peace.
>
> "Unshaken
> undaunted in the face of pain;
> like a departing flame
> the heart was then released."
> ~ S 6.15

The Terrain

3

THIS AND THAT, AND OTHER THINGS

PERHAPS A GOOD PLACE TO START CONTEMPLATING the nature of Nibbāna is in the more mundane realm of things since, just as the Buddha opened his expression of the Four Noble Truths with the common and tangible experience of dukkha, unsatisfactoriness, it will be most helpful to begin this investigation within the realm of the familiar and then to work towards the more subtle and abstruse from there.

There are, of course, many ways to look at the world of things. Most people tend to frame the experiential domain in terms such as: nice/nasty, mine/yours, exists/doesn't exist etc. etc., but for the purposes of this exploration we'll confine our ways of looking at things to two principal ones: a) the study of how things are related to each other, and b) the consideration of things in terms of a subject/object relationship.

The Buddha, as well as the meditation masters who have followed his path, spoke extensively on both approaches. The principal reason being that, by developing an understanding of the nature of conditionality, as it manifests in both these modes, it becomes possible to see that there is a means and an opening to escape from conditionality.

The Eightfold Path described by the Buddha is exactly this means. However, on this point, people often find a paradox: if the goal, Nibbāna, is by definition uncaused, how can a path of practice – which is causal by nature – bring it about? In the Milindapañha, the monk Nāgasena replies to this question with an analogy. He says: The path of practice doesn't cause Nibbāna, it simply takes you there. Just as the road to a mountain does not cause the mountain to come into being, it simply leads you to where it already is.

To begin this exploration of causality and thus approach the 'mountain,' let us look at some commentaries made by contemporary Buddhist teachers.

| 3.1) Idappaccayatā or 'conditionality' is the natural law, the

natural truth that everything depends on causes and conditions. In all the things that are not self, in all naturally changing things, the change always changes according to causes and conditions. Idappaccayatā is the fact that with *this* as cause, *this* exists. With *this* as condition, *this* exists. The existence of anything, and the change of that existence, is always dependent on causes and conditions. Take away the conditions, and *this* will no longer exist.

We use the word idappaccayatā to apply to everything – the entire universe, both physical and mental – but when we speak solely about living things, especially the consciousness of living things, we speak in a more specific way. We talk of paṭicca-samuppāda, dependent co-origination: due to *these* and *these* and *these* and *these* and *these* conditions, dukkha arises. We also speak of paṭiccanirodha, dependent quenching. Through the quenching of this condition, which depends on the quenching of this condition dukkha is quenched, dukkha ends...

The understanding of idappaccayatā, conditionality, and paṭiccasamuppāda, dependent co-origination, is crucial in understanding the mind, how suffering is concocted and how suffering is eliminated.

~ Ven. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, unpublished Dhamma talk, 1988, (Santikaro Bhikkhu trans.)

3.2) The Buddha expressed this/that conditionality [idappaccayatā] in a simple-looking formula:

"(1) When this is, that is.

(2) From the arising of this comes the arising of that.

(3) When this isn't, that isn't.

(4) From the stopping of this comes the stopping of that."

~ A 10.92

There are many possible ways of interpreting this formula, but only one does justice both to the way the formula is worded and to the complex, fluid manner in which specific examples of causal relationships are described in the Canon. That way is to view the formula as the interplay of two causal principles, one linear and the other synchronic, that combine to form a non-linear pattern. The linear principle – taking (2) and (4) as a pair –

connects events, rather than objects, over time; the synchronic principle – (1) and (3) – connects objects and events in the present moment. The two principles intersect, so that any given event is influenced by two sets of conditions: input acting from the past and input acting from the present. Although each principle seems simple, the fact that they interact makes their consequences very complex (e.g. A 6.63). To begin with, every act has repercussions in the present moment together with reverberations extending into the future. Depending on the intensity of the act, these reverberations can last for a very short or a very long time. Thus every event takes place in a context determined by the combined effects of past events coming from a wide range in time, together with the effects of present acts. These effects can intensify one another, can coexist with little interaction or can cancel one another out. Thus, even though it is possible to predict that a certain type of act will tend to give a certain type of result – for example, acting on anger will lead to pain – there is no way to predict when or where that result will make itself felt. (eg M 136.8-21)

The complexity of the system is further enhanced by the fact that both causal principles meet at the mind. Through its views and intentions, the mind takes a causal role in keeping both principles in action. Through its sensory powers it is affected by the results of the causes it has set in motion. This creates the possibility for the causal principles to feed back into themselves, as the mind reacts to the results of its own actions.

These reactions can take the form of positive feedback loops, intensifying the original input and its results, much like the howl in a speaker placed next to the microphone feeding into it. They can also create negative feedback loops, counteracting the original input, much like the action of a thermostat that turns off a heater when the temperature in a room is too high, and turns it on again when it gets too low. Because the results of actions can be immediate, and the mind can then react to them immediately, these feedback loops can at times quickly spin out of control; at other times, they may act as skillful checks on one's behavior. For example, a man may act out of anger, which gives him an immediate sense of dis-ease to which he may react with further

> anger, thus creating a snowballing effect. On the other hand, he may come to understand that the anger is causing his dis-ease, and so immediately does what he can to stop it. However, there can also be times when the results of his past actions may obscure the dis-ease he is causing himself in the present, so that he does not immediately react to it one way or another. In this way, the combination of two causal principles – influences from the past interacting with those in the immediate present – accounts for the complexity of causal relationships as they function on the level of immediate experience. However, the combination of the two principles also opens the possibility for finding a systematic way to break the causal web. If causes and effects were entirely linear, the cosmos would be totally deterministic, and nothing could be done to escape the machinations of the causal process. If they were entirely synchronic, there would be no relationship from one moment to the next, and all events would be arbitrary. The web could break down totally or reform spontaneously for no reason at all. However, with the two modes working together, one can learn from causal patterns observed from the past and apply one's insights to disentangling the same causal patterns acting in the present. If one's insights are true, one can then gain freedom from those patterns. For this reason, the principle of this/that conditionality provides an ideal foundation, both theoretical and practical, for a doctrine of release. And, as a teacher, the Buddha took full advantage of its implications, using it in such a way that it accounts not only for the presentation and content of his teachings, but also for their organization, their function, and their utility. It even accounts for the need for the teachings and for the fact that the Buddha was able to teach them in the first place.
> ~ Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 'The Wings to Awakening,' pp 10-12

Examples of these two types of relationship would also be: a) for the linear principle that connects events, rather than objects, over time – if someone sends you a welcome gift, the next time you see them you immediately feel grateful and friendly toward them; b) for the synchronic principle that connects objects and events in the present moment – when sunlight falls on our body a shadow forms simultaneously. The following passages outline the Buddha's definitions of dependent origination, specific conditionality and the relationship between them:

3.3) “And what, bhikkhus, is dependent origination? With birth as condition, aging-and-death comes to be: whether there be an arising of Tathāgatas or no arising of Tathāgatas, this nature of things still stands, the stableness of the Dhamma, this causal orderliness, the relatedness of this to that (idappaccayatā – specific conditionality). A Tathāgata awakens to this and breaks through to it. Fully enlightened, fully understanding, he explains it, teaches it, proclaims it, establishes it, discloses it, analyzes it, elucidates it. And he says: ‘See! With birth as condition, bhikkhus, aging-and-death comes to be.’

“‘With becoming as condition, birth’… ‘With clinging as condition, becoming’… ‘With craving as condition, clinging’ … ‘With feeling as condition, craving’… ‘With contact as condition, feeling’… ‘With the six sense-spheres as condition, contact’ … ‘With materiality-mentality as condition, the six sense-spheres’ … ‘With consciousness as condition, materiality-mentality… ‘With volitional formations as condition, consciousness’ … ‘With ignorance as condition, volitional formations’: whether there is an arising of Tathāgatas or no arising of Tathāgatas, this nature of things still stands, the stableness of the Dhamma, this causal orderliness, the relatedness of this to that. A Tathāgata awakens to this and breaks through to it. Fully enlightened, fully understanding, he explains it, teaches it, proclaims it, establishes it, discloses it, analyzes it, elucidates it. And he says: ‘See! With ignorance as condition, bhikkhus, volitional formations come to be.’

Thus, bhikkhus, that suchness (tathatā) therein – the invariability (avitathatā), the not-otherwiseness (anaññathatā), the relatedness of this to that – this is called dependent origination.

And what, bhikkhus, are the dependently arisen phenomena? Aging-and-death is impermanent, compounded, dependently arisen, subject to withering, vanishing, fading away and cessation. So too are birth, becoming, grasping, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense-spheres, materiality-mentality, consciousness, volitional formations and ignorance. These also are impermanent, compounded, dependently arisen, subject to withering, vanishing, fading away and cessation. These, bhikkhus, are called the dependently arisen phenomena.

~ S 12.20

3.4) "And what is the noble method that is well seen and well penetrated by insight?
There is the case where a noble disciple notices:
When this is, that is.
From the arising of this comes the arising of that.
When this isn't, that isn't.
From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.
In other words:
With ignorance as condition formations come to be.
With formations as condition consciousness comes to be.
With consciousness as condition materiality-mentality comes to be.
With materiality-mentality as condition the six sense-spheres come to be.
With the six sense-spheres as condition contact comes to be.
With contact as condition feeling comes to be.
With feeling as condition craving comes to be.
With craving as condition clinging comes to be.
With clinging as condition becoming comes to be.
With becoming as condition birth comes to be.
With birth as condition, then old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair all come into being.
Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering.

Now, with the remainderless fading, cessation or absence of that very ignorance comes the cessation of formations.
With the cessation of formations comes the cessation of consciousness.
With the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of materiality-mentality.
With the cessation of materiality-mentality comes the cessation of the six sense-spheres.
With the cessation of the six sense-spheres comes the cessation of contact.
With the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling.
With the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving.
With the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging.
With the cessation of clinging comes the cessation of becoming.
With the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth.

> With the cessation of birth, then old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair all cease.
> Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.
> This is the noble method that is well seen and well penetrated by insight.
> ~ S 12.41, A 10.92

It is said in the scriptures that during the weeks immediately following the Buddha's enlightenment, he contemplated this pattern of insight knowledge; it was a pattern that was completely new to him. It describes the essence of both the central spiritual malaise and its solution.

This process of dependent origination, outlined so succinctly in this sutta, contains more than enough material within it for a book of its own. However, to remain focused on the topics at hand, we will simply present the text for your own investigation, rather than pursuing detailed explanations here.

The subject of causality, and the many ways that different things condition each other – as ennumerated in the 24 categories of the Paṭṭhāna ('Conditional Relations') in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and as summarized above in §3.2 – refers to the different ways that aspects of the objective realm interact. By contemplating the dependent nature of all such phenomena we are better able to appreciate their essentially empty nature and to relate to them with less confusion and attachment.

We'll now take a figurative step back from just viewing the interrelationships of various objects and take a look at the relationship between all these objects and that which is experiencing them, the apparent subject.

We often feel that there is a me in here that's experiencing a world out there, and we can even experience thoughts and feelings as part of the world that 'I' am aware of. However, one of the most profound and liberating insights of the Buddha was that the feeling of I-ness (ahaṃkara) was just as much of a causally created construct as any other perceptual object. He saw that the solidity of the world of things, and of the 'I' that apparently experiences them, were both equally illusory, both void of substance. He saw that, instead, it was more accurate to speak in terms of an 'eye,' but of wisdom, that is the true agent of awareness.

> 3.5) "Friend, one understands a state that can be known with the eye of wisdom (paññācakkhu)."
> ~ M 43.11 (Bhikkhu Bodhi & Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli trans.)

This insight leads us into a contemplation of the relationship of the apparent subject and object – how the tension between the two generates the

world of things and its experiencer, and more importantly how, when that duality is seen through, the heart's liberation is the result.

Probably the clearest and most often quoted of the Buddha's teachings on this is that given to a wanderer called Bāhiya Dārucīriya. According to the scriptures, Bāhiya was a well-respected religious teacher who lived in northern India, somewhere on the seacoast. He was an ascetic of some spiritual accomplishment and he assumed that he was a fully enlightened being. One night a devatā, who had been a relative of his in a former life, came to him and informed him that: "No, you are not an arahant and you are not on the way to becoming one either." Bāhiya was disturbed by this announcement and asked then if there were any genuine arahants in the world. He was told: "Yes indeed," and his celestial visitor described both the Buddha and where he was residing. Bāhiya is said to have started the walk of several hundred miles then and there.

Some days later, having reached the district capital of Sāvatthī, he encountered the Buddha and a group of his monks as they walked on their morning almsround through the narrow, dusty streets of the town. He strode right up and bowed before the Buddha, stopping him in his tracks – and asked to receive teachings on the Dhamma. The Buddha pointed out that this was not a convenient time to teach him, as they were in the middle of collecting their almsfood and around them was all the surge and bustle of an Indian market town at the start of the day; however Bāhiya was undeterred and responded by saying: "Life is a very uncertain thing, venerable sir, it is unknown when either you or I might die, please therefore teach me the Dhamma here and now."

As often occurs in Buddhist scriptures, this exchange was repeated three times. Finally, both because the Buddha could see the truth of Bāhiya's assertion (he himself regularly used the fact of such uncertainty in encouraging a sense of urgency in his students) and because when pressed up to the third time on any question a Buddha has to respond, he then relented and gave Bāhiya this brief but pithy teaching:

> 3.6) In the seen there is only the seen,
> in the heard, there is only the heard,
> in the sensed there is only the sensed,
> in the cognized there is only the cognized:
> This, Bāhiya, is how you should train yourself.
>
> When, Bāhiya, there is for you
> in the seen only the seen,

> in the heard, only the heard,
> in the sensed only the sensed,
> in the cognized only the cognized,
> then, Bāhiya, there is no 'you'
> in connection with that.
>
> When, Bāhiya, there is no 'you'
> in connection with that,
> there is no 'you' there.
>
> When, Bāhiya, there is no 'you' there,
> then, Bāhiya, you are neither here
> nor there
> nor in between the two.
>
> This, just this, is the end of suffering.
> ~ Ud 1.10

Bāhiya realized full enlightenment even as he heard the few words of this teaching, kneeling in the dust and clamour of Sāvatthī that morning; and furthermore, true to his own sense of the fragile nature of existence, moments later he was impaled by a runaway cow and breathed his last.

It was customary of the Buddha to honour those of his disciples who excelled in particular ways, for example: Sāriputta was declared by him to be the keenest in wisdom, Dhammadinnā as the nun most skilled in expounding on the Dhamma – and to Bāhiya he (posthumously) accorded the honour of being the one to gain the swiftest full understanding of his teaching.

This instruction to Bāhiya bears a close relation to the Kālakārāma Sutta, A 4.24, (at §6.8) and is well worth contemplating in connection with that teaching. In addition this discourse to Bāhiya, particularly in its references to non-locality, is comparable to Ud 8.1 (at §9.2), while it also has resonances with the brief comment made by Ajahn Mahā Boowa, included at §9.1. This abandonment of subject/object dualities is largely contingent upon the correct apprehension of the perceptual process, and thus the breaking down of the apparent inside/outside dichotomy of the observer and the observed.

> 3.7) A bhikkhu should so investigate that, as he investigates, his consciousness is not distracted and diffused externally, and

> internally is not fixed, and by not grasping anything he should remain undisturbed. If his consciousness is... undisturbed, then there is no coming into existence of birth, ageing, death and suffering.
> ~ Iti 94

This passage is comparable to one spoken in reference to the nun Jaṭilā Bhāgikā, A 9.37, (included at §7.7). It is also reminiscent of the following commentary on a sūtra of the Northern Buddhist tradition, given by a contemporary meditation master and scholar.

> 3.8) Using your inherent wisdom, observe inwardly the mind and body and outwardly the world. Completely understand both, as you would look through a pane of glass: from the outside seeing in and from the inside seeing out. Inwardly, there is no body and mind, and, outwardly, there is no world. But, although there is no body nor mind nor world, the body and mind and the world function in accord with one another. Although they function together, they are not attached to one another. This is called, "recognizing your own original mind." The original self-nature, the true mind, clearly penetrates within and without.
> The recognition of your original mind is liberation. When you are not attached to sense objects or false thought, you obtain liberation.
> ~ Master Hsüan Hua, 'The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sūtra,' p 149

A spectacularly thorough analysis of the perceptual process and the inability to find oneself anywhere within it (as demonstrated in the brief teaching to Bāhiya) is to be found in the Śūrangama Sūtra, a key text on meditation for the Ch'an school of China.

This passage revolves around the Buddha's pressing of Ānanda, his closest disciple and ever-watchful attendant, to describe exactly where his mind is:

> 3.9) "It is the fault of your mind and eyes that you flow and turn. I am now asking you specifically about your mind and eyes: where are they now?"
> ~ The Śhūrangama Sūtra, 1.169, p7 (BTTS 2003 edn)

The investigation is scrupulous in the extreme, with the trusty Ānanda repeatedly being confounded by the Buddha's wisdom – as he regularly was. Every nuance of object, sense organ and sense consciousness, every possible dimension of subject and object, are explored and demonstrated to be no abiding place for an independent identity.

At its conclusion the analysis arrives at the same conclusion as the teaching to Bāhiya: any clinging whatsoever to this/that, here/there, subject/object, inside/outside or anything in between is synonymous with dukkha; abandon such clinging and dukkha necessarily ceases.

4

"ALL THAT IS CONDITIONED…"

THIS CHAPTER AND THE TWO IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING IT will explore further the qualities of the conditioned realm (saṅkhata dhamma) and the need to relinquish and turn away from it. Firstly, here are some of the Buddha's evaluations of the conditioned world, and the habitual experiences of beings enmeshed in it. This passage comes from the Buddha's solitary reflections in the first weeks following his enlightenment.

> 4.1) "This world is anguished, afflicted by sense-contact,
> even what it calls the 'self' is in fact unsatisfactory;
> for no matter what it conceives,
> the fact is ever other than that.
>
> Always becoming something other, the world
> is held by being, afflicted by being and yet delights in being,
> yet what it relishes brings fear, and what it fears is pain.
> Now this holy life is lived to abandon suffering."
> ~ Ud 3.10

It was also around this time that the Buddha reflected: "This Dhamma that I have realized is profound… subtle, to be experienced only by the wise… If I taught the Dhamma others would not understand me," as recounted at §1.11.

It is sobering that, in seeing the density and complexity of the conditioned realm of mind, matter and living beings, the newly awakened Buddha considered – at least momentarily – that the task of conveying this ultimate of insights was beyond him. Especially so if one takes into account the myths of the countless births of the Bodhisattva, all leading towards this final life as a Sammā-sambuddha – a Fully Self-Awakened One: all that preparation and then… was it going to be impossible to point out the Way to anyone else?

Fortunately, intervention and imploring by the brahmā god Sahampati caused the Buddha to try teaching "those with but a little dust in their eyes," and the world inherited these profound and liberating teachings as a result.

However, the Buddha's hesitancy is a salutary reflection on the task at hand for those who aspire to the unshakable freedom of the heart. The conditioned realm is multilayered, multifaceted, subtle, awesome, colourful, compelling, inspiring, frightening, irritating and generally very convincing with regards to its substantiality, meaning and value.

The teachings we will look at here are confined to the area which is both most fundamental and most subtle, the unsatisfactoriness inherent in the compounded, conditioned, dependent nature of the mental and physical world. This is not because it is the only aspect worth investigating but more that it is the root of the issue. If we can understand this essential quality of the conditioned realm and how it functions, and then learn how to break the enchantment, we have fulfilled the first half of the task of liberation.

The following passages come from two eminent, contemporary commentators: Ven. Bhikkhu Payutto, a Thai monk and author of the encyclopedic commentary 'Buddhadhamma,' from which this quotation is taken; and His Holiness the Dalai Lama – his words here are taken from a session of teachings on the Four Noble Truths, given at the Barbican, London, in 1996.

In both instances the authors have already referred to the first two types of dukkha: dukkha-dukkha – the suffering of painful feelings; and vipariṇāma-dukkha – the unsatisfactoriness inherent in the experience of change. The third type, discussed below, is the most refined of the three.

> 4.2) Saṅkhāra-dukkhatā: the suffering which is inherent within all saṅkhāra, all things which arise from determinants; specifically, the five khandhas. This refers to the subjection of all conditioned things to the contrary forces of birth and dissolution, how they are not perfect within themselves but exist only as part of the cause and effect continuum. As such, they are likely to cause suffering (that is, the feeling of suffering, or dukkha-dukkhatā) whenever there is inflexible craving and clinging to them through ignorance (avijjā-taṇhā-upādāna).
> The most important kind of suffering is the third kind, which describes the nature inherent to all conditions, both physical and mental. Saṅkhāra-dukkhatā as a natural attribute assumes a psychological significance when it is recognized that conditions

are incapable of producing any perfect contentment, and as such will cause suffering for anybody who tries to cling to them.

The principle of Dependent Origination shows the inter-dependence and interrelation of all things in the form of a continuum. As a continuum, it can be analyzed from a number of different perspectives:

All things are inter-related and inter-dependent; all things exist in relation to each other; all things exist dependent on determinants; all things have no enduring existence, not even for a moment; all things have no intrinsic entity; all things are without First Cause, or Genesis.

To put it another way, the fact that all things appear in their diverse forms of growth and decline shows their true nature to be one of a continuum or process. Being a continuum shows them to be compounded of numerous determinants. The form of a continuum arises because the various determinants are inter-related. The continuum moves and changes form because the various factors concerned cannot endure, even for a moment. Things cannot endure, even for a moment, because they have no intrinsic entity. Because they have no intrinsic entity they are entirely dependent on determinants. Because the determinants are inter-related and inter-dependent, they maintain the form of a continuum, and being so inter-related and inter-dependent indicates that they have no First Cause.

To render it in a negative form: if things had any intrinsic entity they would have to possess some stability; if they could be stable, even for a moment, they could not be truly inter-related; if they were not inter-related they could not be formed into a continuum; if there were no continuum of cause and effect, the workings of nature would be impossible; and if there were some real intrinsic self within that continuum there could be no true inter-dependent cause and effect process. The continuum of cause and effect which enables all things to exist as they do can only operate because such things are transient, ephemeral, constantly arising and ceasing and having no intrinsic entity of their own.

The property of being transient, ephemeral, arising and ceasing,

is called aniccatā. The property of being subject to birth and dissolution, of inherently involving stress and conflict, and of being intrinsically imperfect, is called dukkhatā. The quality of voidness of any real self is called anattatā. The principle of Dependent Origination illustrates these three properties in all things and shows the inter-relatedness and inter-reaction of all things to produce the diverse events in nature.
~ Bhikkhu Payutto, 'Dependent Origination,' pp 14-15

4.3) Finally, we come to the third type of suffering, the suffering of conditioning. This addresses the main question: why is this the nature of things? The answer is, because everything that happens in saṃsāra is due to ignorance. Under the influence or control of ignorance, there is no possibility of a permanent state of happiness. Some kind of trouble, some kind of problem, always arises. So long as we remain under the power of ignorance, that is, our fundamental misapprehension or confusion about the nature of things, then sufferings come one after another, like ripples on water.

The third level of suffering, therefore, refers to the bare fact of our unenlightened existence, which is under the influence of this fundamental confusion and of the negative karmas to which confusion gives rise. The reason it is called the suffering of conditioning is because this state of existence serves as the basis not only for painful experiences in this life, but also for the causes and conditions of suffering in the future.

Dharmakīrti's 'Commentary on the Compendium of Valid Cognition' (Pramāṇavarttika) and Āryadeva's 'Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way' (Chatusḥataka shastrakarika) both offer a useful way of looking at this third level of suffering, and help deepen our understanding of it. Both works lay the emphasis on reflecting upon the subtle level of the transient, impermanent nature of reality.

It is important to bear in mind that there are two levels of meaning here. One can understand impermanence in terms of how something arises, stays for a while, and then disappears. This level of impermanence can be understood quite easily. We should add that on this level, the dissolution of something

requires a secondary condition which acts as a catalyst to destroy its continuity. However, there is also a second, more subtle understanding of transience. From this more subtle perspective, the obvious process of change we have just described is merely the effect of a deeper, underlying and dynamic process of change. At a deeper level, everything is changing from moment to moment, constantly. This process of momentary change is not due to a secondary condition that arises to destroy something, but rather the very cause that led a thing to arise is also the cause of its destruction. In other words, within the cause of its origin lies the cause of its cessation.

Momentariness should thus be understood in two ways. First, in terms of the three moments of existence of any entity – in the first instant, it arises; in the second instant, it stays; in the third instant, it dissolves. Second, in terms of each instant itself. An instant is not static; as soon as it arises, it moves towards its own cessation.

Since everything arises complete from the outset, the birth of things comes together with the seed or potential for their dissolution. In this respect, one could say that their cessation does not depend on any secondary, further condition. Therefore, in Buddhism, all phenomena are said to be 'other-powered,' that is, they are under the control of their causes.

Once you have developed this understanding of the transient nature of phenomena, you are able to situate the understanding you have of dukkha within that context, and reflect upon your life as an individual in this saṃsāric world. You know that since the world has come into being as a result of its own causes and conditions, it too must be other-powered. In other words, it must be under the control of the causal processes that led to its arising. However, in the context of saṃsāra, the causes that we are referring to here are nothing other than our fundamental confusion or ignorance (marigpa in Tibetan), and the delusory states to which confusion gives rise. We know that so long as we are under the domination of this fundamental confusion, there is no room for lasting joy or happiness. Of course, within the Three Realms there are states which are comparatively more joyful than others. However, so long as we remain within saṃsāra, whether

> in the Form Realm, the Formless Realm or the Desire Realm, there is no scope for joy to be lasting. In the final analysis, we are in a state of dukkha. This is the meaning of the third type of suffering.
> ~ H.H. the Dalai Lama, 'The Four Noble Truths,' pp 53-57

We now move back to the Pali Canon. The following passages clearly demonstrate both the power of reflective wisdom in the process of liberation and the need for turning away from fixation on the conditioned realm if the Truth is to be realized and the heart released.

> 4.4) "Here, householder, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. He considers that and understands it thus: 'This first jhāna is conditioned and volitionally produced (abhisaṅkhataṃ abhisañcetayitaṃ), but whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' Standing upon that, he attains the destruction of the āsavas (mental outflows). But if he does not attain the destruction of the āsavas, then because of that desire for the Dhamma, that delight in the Dhamma, with the destruction of the five lower fetters he becomes one due to reappear spontaneously in the Pure Abodes, there to attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world."

This passage is then repeated with reference to, firstly, the other three rūpa-jhānas, then the four brahma-vihāras (mettā, loving-kindness; karuṇā, compassion; muditā, sympathetic joy; and upekkhā, equanimity) and the first three of the arūpa-jhānas – the fourth of these (the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception) and the state of nirodha samāpatti (the cessation of perception and feeling) are not mentioned because, it is said, they are states too subtle for their constituent factors to be used as objects of insight contemplation.

After each one of these paragraphs the Ven. Ānanda (who is expounding this discourse) says:

> "This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One... wherein

> if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute... he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before."
> ~ M 52.4-14, A 11.17 (abridged)

In the following sutta the Buddha goes into a little more detail concerning the essentially unsatisfactory nature of all formations. He also, once again, points to the simple and direct recognition of that very unsatisfactoriness, via the fact of impermanence, as the key contemplative method for freeing the heart from bondage to the conditioned realm.

> 4.5) Then Ven. Ānanda, together with a group of bhikkhus, went to where the Blessed One was staying in Pārileyyaka, at the root of the Auspicious Sāla Tree, and on arrival, after bowing down to him, sat down to one side. As they were sitting there, the Blessed One instructed, urged, roused and encouraged them with talk on the Dhamma.
> Then this thought arose in the mind of one of the monks, "Now I wonder – by knowing in what way, seeing in what way, can one immediately put an end to the mental outflows?"
> The Blessed One, discerning the train of thought in the bhikkhu's mind, said to the bhikkhus, "I have analyzed and taught you the Dhamma, bhikkhus. I have analyzed and taught you the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment and the noble eightfold path.... And yet still there appears this train of thought in the mind of one of the bhikkhus, 'Now I wonder – knowing in what way, seeing in what way, can one immediately put an end to the mental outflows?'
> "So, by knowing in what way, seeing in what way, can one immediately put an end to the mental outflows? There is the case where an uninstructed, ordinary person... assumes the body and form to be self. That assumption is a formation. Now what is the cause, what is the origination of that formation, from what is it born and produced? When an uninstructed, ordinary person is touched by a feeling born of contact accompanied by ignorance, craving arises. That formation is born of that. And that formation is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen. That craving...

That feeling ... That contact... That ignorance is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen. It is by knowing and seeing in this way that one can one immediately put an end to the mental outflows.

"Or they do not assume the body and form to be the self, but they assume the self possesses form... form as in the self... self as in form... or feeling to be the self... the self as possessing feeling ... feeling as in the self... self as in feeling... or perception to be the self... the self as possessing perception... perception as in the self... self as in perception... or formations to be the self... the self as possessing formations... formations as in the self... self as in formations... or consciousness to be the self... the self as possessing consciousness... consciousness as in the self... self as in consciousness.

"Now that assumption is a formation. What is the cause... of that formation? When an uninstructed, ordinary person is touched by a feeling born of contact accompanied by ignorance, craving arises. That formation is born of that. And that formation is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen. That craving... That feeling... That contact... That ignorance is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen. It is by knowing and seeing in this way that one can one immediately put an end to the mental outflows.

"Or... they may have a view such as this: 'This self is the same as the universe. Thus after death I will be constant, lasting, eternal not subject to change.' This eternalist view is a formation... Or... they may have a view such as this: 'I might not be, and neither might there be what is mine. I will not be, neither will there be what is mine.' This annihilationist view is a formation... Or... they may be perplexed, doubtful and indecisive with regard to the true Dhamma. That perplexity, doubtfulness and indecisiveness is a formation.

"Now what is the cause, what is the origination of that formation, from what is it born and produced? When an uninstructed, ordinary person is touched by a feeling born of contact accompanied by ignorance, craving arises. That formation is born of that.

"So that formation, bhikkhus, is impermanent, conditioned,

> dependently arisen. That craving… That feeling… That contact… That ignorance is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen. When one knows and sees thus the mental outflows are immediately brought to an end."
> ~ S 22.81

Another key passage from the Pali Canon which relates to this issue is found in the rich and colourful Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta.

> 4.6) "Suppose, bhikkhu, a skilled goldsmith or his apprentice were to prepare a furnace, heat up the crucible, take some gold with tongs, and put it into the crucible. From time to time he would blow on it, from time to time he would sprinkle water over it, and from time to time he would just look on. That gold would become refined, well refined, completely refined, faultless, rid of dross, malleable, wieldy, and radiant. Then whatever kind of ornament he wished to make from it, whether a golden chain or earrings or a necklace or a golden garland, it would serve his purpose. So too, bhikkhu, there then remains [in the mind of the meditator] only equanimity, purified and bright, malleable, wieldy, and radiant.
> "He understands thus: 'If I were to direct this equanimity, so purified and bright, to the base of infinite space and to develop my mind accordingly, then this equanimity of mine, supported by that base, clinging to it, would remain for a very long time. If I were to direct this equanimity, so purified and bright, to the base of infinite consciousness… to the base of nothingness… to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and develop my mind accordingly, then this equanimity of mine, supported by that base, clinging to it, would remain for a very long time.'
> "He understands thus: 'If I were to direct this equanimity, so purified and bright, to the base of infinite space and to develop my mind accordingly, that would be conditioned. If I were to direct this equanimity, so purified and bright, to the base of infinite consciousness… to the base of nothingness… to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and to develop my mind accordingly, that would be conditioned.' He does not form any attitude or generate any intention tending towards either

> being or non-being. Since he does not form any attitude or generate any intention tending towards either being or non-being, he does not cling to anything in this world. When he does not cling, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he personally attains Nibbāna. He understands thus: 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.'"
> ~ M 140.20-22

One of the messages that repeatedly comes through these teachings concerns the emotional results of fully comprehending conditioned reality. Again and again it is the true seeing of instability, unsatisfactoriness and the emptiness of all things that leads to disenchantment with and dispassion toward the realm of the senses, the thinking mind and even to refined states of consciousness.

With the enchantment broken, the attitude radically shifts and the heart changes, there is a natural turning away from the conditioned, the born and the dying. For many, it is this more emotive response to clearly seeing conditioned reality that provides the impetus to set it all down, thus leading to the possibility of realizing the Unconditioned.

Reflection on these limitations of conditionality is a recurrent theme in another of the highly significant suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya, the Pañcattaya Sutta. This discourse describes how the nature of experience is wisely analysed in meditation, in order to see clearly and abandon all subtle and gross forms of clinging. The Buddha's description of tracking "the origination, the disappearance, the gratification, the danger and the escape in the case of the six bases of sense-contact," is a very pithy synopsis of the process of insight meditation.

> 4.7) "Whether [based on] perceptions of form or of the formless, of the limited or of the immeasurable – some assert the base of nothingness, immeasurable and impeturbable, [to be the self]. However, all that is conditioned and thus gross, but there is cessation of formations. Having known 'There is this,' and seeing the escape from it all, the Tathāgata has gone beyond it."

This formula is then repeated with respect to a wide variety of speculative views: three more on the nature of the self after death, sixteen on the relationship of the self and the world, and a final four on the misapprehension of Nibbāna here and now. All of these paragraphs conclude with the same refrain:

> "All that is conditioned and thus gross, but there is cessation of formations. Having known 'There is this,' and seeing the escape from it all, the Tathāgata has gone beyond it."

The Buddha then concludes his discourse with the following words:

> "Bhikkhus, this supreme state of sublime peace has been discovered by the Tathāgata, that is, liberation through not clinging, by understanding as they actually are the origination, the disappearance, the gratification, the danger and the escape in the case of the six bases of sense-contact."
> ~ M 102.4-25 (abridged)

To follow on from this teaching, here is an example of an individual applying this skillful analysis to the realm of speculative views. There are, of course, many other areas where the habits of clinging can feed and flourish. For example in the pursuit of sense pleasure, in attachment to societal and religious conventions and, the most insidious and subtle of all, clinging to feelings of 'I,' 'me' and 'mine.' What Anāthapiṇḍika demonstrates here, and which Ajahn Chah explicates with great thoroughness in the passage following, is the fine art of employing a convention, or a point of view, yet simultaneously, and without hypocrisy, seeing it as dependently originated, empty of substance and thus un-ownable, like all other things.

> 4.8) Then the householder Anāthapiṇḍika went to where some wanderers of other sects were staying. On arrival he greeted them courteously and, after this exchange of friendly pleasantries, he sat down at one side. As he was sitting there the wanderers said to him, "Tell us, householder, what views the Samaṇa Gotama has."
> "Venerable sirs, I don't exactly know what views the Blessed One has."
> "Well, well, so you don't exactly know what views the Samaṇa Gotama has; well, tell us then what views his monastic disciples have."
> "Venerable sirs, I don't exactly know what views his monastic disciples have either."
> "Well, well, so you don't exactly know what views the Samaṇa

> Gotama has and you don't exactly know what views his monastic disciples have either. Can you tell us then what views you have?"
> "It would not be difficult for me to expound to you what views I have. But if the venerable ones would first please expound their views, each according to their own perspective, then that would make it easier for me to expound to you what views I have."
> When this had been said, one of the wanderers stated to Anāthapiṇḍika:
> "The universe is eternal – only this is true, everything else is wrong. This is the view I hold."
> Another wanderer stated to Anāthapiṇḍika: "The universe is not eternal – only this is true, everything else is wrong. This is the view I hold."
> Another wanderer stated: "The universe is finite... The universe is infinite... The self and the body are the same... The self is one thing and the body another... After death a Tathāgata exists... After death a Tathāgata does not exist... After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist... After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist – only this is true, everything else is wrong. This is the view I hold."
> When this had all been said, the householder Anāthapiṇḍika said to the wanderers, "As for the venerable one who says: 'The universe is eternal – only this is true, everything else is wrong. This is the view I hold' – this view has arisen from his own unwise consideration or in dependence on the words of another. Now, this view has been brought into being, is fabricated, volitionally produced and has originated dependent on causes. Whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, volitionally produced and is dependently originated, that is transient and uncertain, and whatever is transient and uncertain is unsatisfactory. Thus this venerable one adheres to that which is intrinsically unsatisfactory, he commits himself to dissatisfaction."

Anāthapiṇḍika then proceeds to treat the rest of these ten classical philosophical positions in the same way.

> When this had been said, the wanderers said to the householder Anāthapiṇḍika, "We have all expounded our views,

> each according to our own perspective. Now tell us what views you hold."
> "'Whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, volitionally produced and is dependently originated, that is transient and uncertain, and whatever is transient and uncertain is unsatisfactory. That which is unsatisfactory does not belong to me, is not what I am, it is not my self.' This is the view I hold."
> "Householder, your belief that: 'whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, volitionally produced and is dependently originated, that is transient and uncertain, and whatever is transient and uncertain is unsatisfactory' is subject to the same logic! Thus you too adhere to that which is intrinsically unsatisfactory, you too commit yourself to dissatisfaction."
> "Venerable sirs, whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, volitionally produced and is dependently originated, that is transient and uncertain, and whatever is transient and uncertain is unsatisfactory. That which is unsatisfactory does not belong to me, is not what I am, it is not my self. Having understood this with true wisdom, as it actually is, I have also discerned the genuine means for transcendence of it."
> When this had been said, the wanderers became silent, dismayed, with their shoulders drooping and their heads sunk down on their chests, glum and with nothing to say. The householder Anāthapiṇḍika, perceiving that the wanderers were silent... glum and with nothing to say, stood up and left that place.
> ~ A 10.93

Finally, in this chapter, here are some of the words of Ven. Ajahn Chah on the issue of the conditioned realm and its relationship to the Unconditioned.

> 4.9) The Buddha talked about saṅkhata dhammas and asaṅkhata dhammas – conditioned and unconditioned things. Conditioned things are innumerable – material or immaterial, big or small – if our mind is under the influence of delusion, it will proliferate about these things, dividing them up into good and bad, short and long, coarse and refined. Why does the mind proliferate like this? Because it doesn't know conventional determinate reality, it doesn't know about conditions. Not knowing

these things, the mind doesn't see the Dhamma. Not seeing the Dhamma, the mind is full of clinging. As long as the mind is held down by clinging there can be no escape from the conditioned world. As long as there is no escape, there is confusion, birth, old age, sickness, and death, even in the thinking processes. This kind of mind is called the saṅkhata dhamma (conditioned mind).

Asaṅkhata dhamma, the unconditioned, refers to the mind that has seen the Dhamma, the truth of the five khandhas as they are – as transient, imperfect and ownerless. All ideas of 'me' and 'mine,' 'them' and 'theirs,' belong to the determined reality. Really they are all conditions. When we know the truth of conditions we know the truth of the conventions. When we know conditions as neither ourselves nor belonging to us, we let go of conditions and conventions. When we let go of conditions we attain the Dhamma, we enter into and realize the Dhamma. When we attain the Dhamma we know clearly. What do we know? We know that there are only conditions and conventions, no self, no 'us' no 'them.' This is knowledge of the way things are. Seeing in this way the mind transcends things. The body may grow old, get sick and die, but the mind transcends this state. When the mind transcends conditions, it knows the unconditioned. The mind becomes the unconditioned, the state which no longer contains conditioning factors. The mind is no longer conditioned by the concerns of the world, conditions no longer contaminate the mind. Pleasure and pain no longer affect it. Nothing can affect the mind or change it, the mind is assured, it has escaped all constructions. Seeing the true nature of conditions and the determined, the mind becomes free.

This freed mind is called the unconditioned, that which is beyond the power of constructing influences. If the mind doesn't really know conditions and determinations, it is moved by them. Encountering good, bad, pleasure or pain, it proliferates about them. Why does it proliferate? Because there is still a cause. What is the cause? The cause is the understanding that the body is one's self or belongs to the self; that feelings are self or belonging to self; that perception is self or belonging to self; that conceptual thought is self or belonging to self; that consciousness is self or belonging to self. The tendency to conceive things in terms of self is the source of happiness, suffering, birth, old

age, sickness and death. This is the worldly mind, spinning around and changing at the directives of worldly conditions. This is the conditioned mind.

The reason you can't see these things in line with the truth is because you keep believing the untrue. It's like being guided by a blind person. How can you travel in safety? A blind person will only lead you into forests and thickets. How could they lead you to safety when they can't see? In the same way our mind is deluded by conditions, creating suffering in search for happiness, creating difficulty in the search for ease. Such a mind only makes for difficulty and suffering. Really we want to get rid of suffering and difficulty, but instead we create those very things. All we can do is complain. We create bad causes, and the reason we do so is because we don't know the truth of appearances and conditions.

* * *

Appearances are determined into existence. Why must we determine them? Because they don't intrinsically exist. For example, suppose somebody wanted to make a marker. They would take a piece of wood or a rock and place it on the ground, and then call it a marker. Actually it's not a marker. There isn't any marker, that's why you must determine it into existence. In the same way we 'determine' cities, people, cattle – everything! Why must we determine these things? Because originally they do not exist.

Concepts such as 'monk' and 'layperson' are also 'determinnations.' We determine these things into existence because intrinsically they aren't here. It's like having an empty dish – you can put anything you like into it because it's empty. This is the nature of determined reality. Men and women are simply determined concepts, as are all the things around us.

If we know the truth of determinations clearly, we will know that there are no beings, because 'beings' are determined things. Understanding that these things are simply determinations, you can be at peace. But if you believe that the person, being, the 'mine,' the 'theirs,' and so on are intrinsic qualities, then you must laugh and cry over them. These are the proliferation of conditioning factors. If we take such things to be ours there will

always be suffering. This is micchādiṭṭhi, Wrong View. Names are not intrinsic realities, they are provisional truths. Only after we are born do we obtain names, isn't that so? Or did you have your name already when you were born? The name comes afterwards, right? Why must we determine these names? Because intrinsically they aren't there.

We should clearly understand these determinations. Good, evil, high, low, black and white are all determinations. We are all lost in determinations. This is why at the funeral ceremonies the monks chant, Aniccā vata saṅkhārā... "Conditions are impermanent, they arise and pass away..." That's the truth. What is there that, having arisen, doesn't cease? Everything arises and then ceases. People are born and then they die. Bad moods arise and then cease. Good moods arise and then cease. Have you ever seen anybody cry for three or four years? At the most, you may see people crying a whole night, and then the tears dry up. "Having arisen, they cease..."

"Tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho," ("And in their passing is peace.") If we understand saṅkhāras, proliferations, and thereby subdue them, this is the greatest happiness. This is true merit, to be calmed of proliferations, calmed of 'being,' calmed of individuality, of the burden of self. Transcending these things one sees the unconditioned. This means that no matter what happens, the mind doesn't proliferate around it. There's nothing that can throw the mind off its natural balance. What else could you want? This is the end, the finish.

* * *

Let the knowing spread from within you and you will be practising rightly. If you want to see a train, just go to the central station, you don't have to go travelling all the way up the Northern Line, the Southern Line, the Eastern Line and the Western Line to see all the trains. If you want to see trains, every single one of them, you'd be better off waiting at Grand Central Station, that's where they all terminate.

Now some people tell me, "I want to practise but I don't know how. I'm not up to studying the scriptures, I'm getting old now, my memory's not so good..." Just look right here [pointing at his heart], at 'Central Station.' Greed arises here, anger arises here,

delusion arises here. Just sit here and you can watch as all these things arise. Practise right here, because right here is where you're stuck. Right here is where the determined arises, where conventions arise, and right here is where the Dhamma will arise.

* * *

Some people say they can't practise as a lay person, the environment is too crowded. If you live in a crowded place, then look into crowdedness, make it open and wide. The mind has been deluded by crowdedness, train it to know the truth of crowdedness. The more you neglect the practice the more you neglect going to the monastery and listening to the teaching, the more your mind will sink down into the bog, like a frog going into a hole. Someone comes along with a hook and the frog's done for, it doesn't have a chance. All it can do is stretch out its neck and offer it to them. So watch out you don't work yourself into a tiny corner – someone may just come along with a hook and scoop you up. At home, being pestered by your children and grandchildren, you are even worse off than the frog! You don't know how to detach from these things. When old age, sickness and death come along, what will you do? This is the hook that's going to get you. Which way will you turn?

This is the predicament our minds are in. Engrossed in the children, the relatives, the possessions... and we don't know how to let them go. Without morality or understanding to free things up there is no way out for us. When feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness produce suffering you always get caught up in it. Why is there this suffering? If you don't investigate you won't know. If happiness arises you simply get caught up in happiness, delighting in it. You don't ask yourself, ‘where does this happiness come from?'

So change your understanding. You can practise anywhere, because the mind is with you everywhere. If you think good thoughts while sitting, you can be aware of them; if you think bad thoughts you can be aware of them also. These things are with you. While lying down, if you think good thoughts or bad thoughts, you can know them also, because the place to practise is in the mind.

Some people think you have to go to the monastery every single day. That's not necessary, just look at your own mind. If you know where the practice is you'll be assured.

* * *

All things are just as they are. They don't cause suffering in themselves, just like a thorn, a really sharp thorn. Does it make you suffer? No, it's just a thorn, it doesn't bother anybody. But if you go and stand on it, then you'll suffer. Why is there this suffering? Because you stepped on the thorn. The thorn is just minding its own business, it doesn't harm anybody. Only if you step on the thorn will you suffer over it. It's because of we ourselves that there's pain. Form, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness... all the things in this world are simply there as they are. It's we who pick fights with them. And if we hit them they're going to hit us back. If they're left on their own they won't bother anybody, only the swaggering drunkard gives them trouble. All conditions fare according to their nature. That's why the Buddha said, "Tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho": If we subdue conditions, seeing determinations and conditions as they really are, as neither 'me' nor 'mine,' 'us' nor 'them,' when we see that these beliefs are simply sakkāyadiṭṭhi, the conditions are freed of the self-delusion.

If you think 'I'm good,' 'I'm bad,' 'I'm great,' 'I'm the best,' then you are thinking wrongly. If you see all these thoughts as merely determinations and conditions, then when others say, 'good' or 'bad' you can leave it be with them. As long as you still see it as 'me' and 'you' it's like having three hornets' nests – as soon as you say something the hornets come buzzing out to sting you. The three hornets' nests are sakkāyadiṭṭhi, vicikicchā, and sīlabbataparāmāsa.*

Once you look into the true nature of determinations and conditions, pride cannot prevail. Other people's fathers are just like our father, their mothers are just like ours, their children are just like ours. We see the happiness and suffering of other beings as just like ours.

*These are the first three of the Ten Fetters, the obstructions to enlightenment: 1) identification with the body and the personality; 2) doubt about the nature of the Path; 3) clinging to rules, roles and conventions and believing that, for example, purification can come through the mere enactment of a procedure. Transcendence of these three is synonymous with Stream Entry – the first of the four levels of enlightenment.

* * *

So here is the practice. If I talked any more it would just be more of the same. Another talk would just be the same as this. I've brought you this far, now you think about it. I've brought you to the Path, whoever's going to go, it's there for you. Those who aren't going, can stay. The Buddha only sees you to the beginning of the Path. Akkhātaro Tathāgatā – the Tathāgata only points the way. For my practice he only taught this much. The rest was up to me. Now I teach you, I can tell you just this much. I can bring you only to the beginning of the Path, whoever wants to go back can go back, whoever wants to travel on can travel on. It's up to you, now.
~ Ven. Ajahn Chah, 'Toward the Unconditioned,' in 'Food for the Heart,' pp 385-9, (adapted)

4.10) The things of this world are merely conventions of our own making. Having established them we get lost in them and refuse to let go, giving rise to personal views and opinions. This clinging never ends, it is saṃsāra, flowing endlessly on. It has no completion.
Now, if we know conventional reality then we'll know liberation. If we clearly know liberation then we'll know convention. This is to know the Dhamma. Here there is completion.
~ Ven. Ajahn Chah, 'Convention and Liberation,' in 'Food for the Heart,' p 307

5

"TO BE, OR NOT TO BE" – IS THAT THE QUESTION?

WHEREAS THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER LARGELY LOOKED at the relationship between objects of experience (i.e. object/object conditionality), we will now investigate that other dimension of the experiential realm, the relationship between objects and their subject (subject/object conditionality).

One of the most subtle and invaluable aspects of the Buddha's teaching is the way in which it illuminates the conundrum of selfhood, together with its treatment of the age-old questions of being and non-being, existence and non-existence. The main thrust of the Buddha's insight into this area is hinted at by the title of this chapter; that is to say, much of the confusion and strife in the conceptual realm over these issues seems to have come from asking the wrong questions – questions based on axioms and unconscious presuppositions which do not accord with reality. If one adopts the world view embedded in the wording of such biased questions, then no response which accords with reality can come forth.

> 5.1) One cannot too often and too emphatically stress the fact that not only for the actual realization of the goal of Nibbāna, but also for a theoretical understanding of it, it is an indispensable preliminary condition to grasp fully the truth of Anattā, the egolessness and insubstantiality of all forms of existence. Without such an understanding, one will necessarily misconceive Nibbāna – according to one's either materialistic or metaphysical leanings – either as annihilation of an ego, or as an eternal state of existence into which an Ego or Self enters or with which it merges.
> ~ Nyanatiloka Bhikkhu, 'Buddhist Dictionary,' p 106

Central to the path of insight into this area is a recognition that the sense of

self is a conditioned, natural quality. Neither eternally self-existent nor essentially non-existent, it arises and passes away dependent on causes and conditions.

> 5.2) "Bhikkhu, 'I am' is a conceiving; 'I am this' is a conceiving; 'I shall be' is a conceiving; 'I shall not be' is a conceiving; 'I shall be possessed of form' is a conceiving; 'I shall be formless' is a conceiving; 'I shall be percipient' is a conceiving; 'I shall be non-percipient' is a conceiving. Conceiving is a disease, conceiving is a tumour, conceiving is a barb. By overcoming all conceivings, bhikkhu, one is called a sage at peace. And the sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die; they are not shaken and are not agitated. For there is nothing present in them by which they might be born. Not being born, how could they age? Not ageing, how could they die? Not dying, how could they be shaken? Not being shaken, why should they be agitated?"
> ~ M 140.31

There is some controversy as to the definitive meaning in this and related passages of phrases such as: "the sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die." Those who uphold the view that the teachings on dependent origination refer only to the passage of events over three lifetimes (past, present and future) assert that this means birth etc. in future lives. This is the view tentatively expressed by Ācariya Buddhaghosa in the 'Visuddhimagga' – the principal commentarial compendium on the Theravāda teachings – although it should also be said that he does allow for dependent origination in one lifetime as well.

Those who feel that the dependent origination teachings can refer to both the microcosm of the present moment and present life, and the macrocosm of the span of several lives, tend to interpret such phrases as meaning a psychological birth rather than an obstetric one – i.e. no sense of self is born. This outlook on things – that the pattern of dependent origination follows the laws of scale invariance and thus pertains over a variety of orders of magnitude – is borne out by a number of key statements of the Buddha, most notably:

> 5.3) Heedfulness is the path to the Deathless,
> heedlessness is the path to death;
> the heedful never die,
> the heedless are as if dead already.
> ~ Dhp 21

As far as the explorations of this book, an interpretation which allows both 'present moment' and 'three lifetimes' models seems both valid and useful, particularly in reference to the investigation of self/not-self and being/non-being.

It should be noted from the first that the terms 'conceives' (maññati) and 'conceit' (māna) have a broader meaning in Pali than their usual English counterparts; e.g. from the Buddhist point of view 'conception' can be used to express the view that 'I don't exist,' and perversely (to common English usage) one can hold the 'conceit' that 'I am the worst person in the world.' In the Pali scriptures there are numerous places where such qualities are described. For example:

> 5.4) "The (equality-) conceit (māna), the inferiority-conceit (omāna), and the superiority-conceit (atimāna): this threefold conceit should be overcome. That one who has overcome this threefold conceit, through the full penetration of conceit, is said to have put an end to suffering."
> ~ A 6.49

> 5.5) "Those samaṇas and brahmins who, relying on the impermanent, unsatisfying and transitory nature of material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness, conceive that: 'I am better,' or 'I am equal,' or 'I am worse' – all these imagine thus through not understanding reality."
> ~ S 22.49

A similar teaching is given by the Buddha to a female devatā "of stunning beauty" who encountered and propositioned the young bhikkhu Samiddhi, just after he emerged from the hot springs at Rājagaha and was drying himself on the bank. He declines her invitation and tries to explain why he is not interested in sensual pleasure.

When she fails to understand his reasoning, he encourages her to go and ask the Buddha. She, very poignantly, responds that as a humble and junior female devatā, it isn't easy for those such as she to approach the Buddha as he is often surrounded by other more powerful and influential celestial beings. The Commentary adds that the deva-rājas usually have a retinue of one billion or ten billion so one could see how it might be possible to get lost in the crowd.

Kindly, Samiddhi goes to see the Buddha and, effectively, arranges an audience for the devatā. When she again fails to grasp the meaning of the teaching, the Buddha expands on what he has said with:

> 5.6) “One who conceives, ‘I am equal, better or worse,’
> Might on that account engage in disputes.
> But one not shaken in the three discriminations
> Does not think, ‘I am equal or better,’”

Still our keen protagonist cannot fathom the meaning and so asks the Buddha to explain in more detail. He responds:

> “He abandoned reckoning, did not assume conceit;
> He cut off craving here for name-and-form.
> Though devas and humans search for him
> Here and beyond, in the heavens and all abodes,
> They do not find the one whose knots are cut,
> The one untroubled, free of longing.
>
> “If you understand, spirit, speak up.”

The commentary tells us that the devatā, having at last understood, realized stream-entry. She then uttered the following words, to express her realization of the implications of the insight that had opened up for her:

> “I understand in detail, venerable sir, the meaning of what was
> stated in brief by the Blessed One thus:
> One should do no evil in all the world,
> Not by speech, mind or body.
> Having abandoned sense pleasures,
> Mindful and clearly comprehending,
> One should not pursue a course
> That is painful and harmful.”
> ~ S 1.20 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The Niddesa codifies the three modes mentioned in these suttas into a final, comprehensive matrix of the Nine Types of Conceit:

> 5.7) If you're superior and you think “I'm superior”
> If you're superior and you think “I'm equal”
> If you're superior and you think “I'm inferior”
> If you're equal and you think “I'm superior”

> If you're equal and you think "I'm equal"
> If you're equal and you think "I'm inferior"
> If you're inferior and you think "I'm superior"
> If you're inferior and you think "I'm equal"
> If you're inferior and you think "I'm inferior"
> ~ Nid 80.226

All of these are conceits based on wrong view and will necessarily result in dukkha. To the Western rationalist mind it is particularly worthy of note that even those judgments that are 'right' conventionally speaking are 'wrong' in terms of Dhamma – ergo, if it has 'I am' in it, meditator beware.

There is a collection of phrases which is used over and over again in the teachings to encapsulate the key modalities of such conceit. These phrases first appeared very early on in the Buddha's teaching career, when he expounded the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta – the second discourse to the group of five wanderers who were his first disciples. The words in question come in his analysis of the five khandhas in the light of the Three Characteristics of Existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self:

> 5.8) "What do you think, bhikkhus, is material form permanent or impermanent?"
> "Impermanent, venerable sir."
> "Is that which is impermanent satisfying or unsatisfying?"
> "Unsatisfying, venerable sir."
> "Is that which is impermanent, unsatisfying and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine (etaṃ mama), this is what I am (eso ham asmi), this is my self (eso me attā).'
> "No, venerable sir."
> ~ S 22.59, MV 1.6

These phrases are not solely used in relation to the five khandhas; for example, Ven. Sāriputta employs them together with an examination of the six senses in his questioning of the bhikkhu Channa, shortly before the latter's death.

> 5.9) "Friend Channa, do you regard the eye, eye-consciousness and things cognizable [by the mind] through eye consciousness thus: 'This is mine, this is what I am, this is my self'? ...[So too with] the ear... nose... tongue... body... mind...?'"
> ~ M 144.9

These three phrases quoted in §5.8 with their Pali originals, are known as the gāha – the obsessions (the word is derived from the image of being seized and carried off by a demon) – and they correspond to three principle defilements: taṇhā, māna and diṭṭhi – craving, conceit and views. The first is built around the delusion of ownership and possessiveness, the second around the subtle conceit of identity, and the third around the concretization of the body and personality.

The gāha are also closely allied with what are known as the 'papañca-dhammas': taṇhā, diṭṭhi and māna – the qualities are the same, only the ordering is different. Although, having said that, it may be said that the diṭṭhi in papañca is of a more abstract nature, rather than directly about one's 'self' – as in "my view is that the universe is eternal, etc." Taking a stand on that view, one gets puffed up and 'conceives,' or self gets invested at that point. This is seen in 'The Shorter Discourse on the Lion's Roar' (M 11) where grasping at views of annihilationism, eternalism, etc. precedes the full-blown 'notion of self' as an object of clinging.

Either way, these qualities are the root causes of conceptual proliferation, the random and unruly chattering of the thinking mind. For the Buddha's advice on how to best deal with this particular condition, the Madhupiṇḍika Sutta (M 18) is the finest resource. There is also a very helpful and practical explication of this, and related teachings, in 'Concept and Reality' by Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda (BPS).

The conceits of identity can be extremly subtle, as described, for example, by the Buddha in the Pañcattaya Sutta.

> 5.10) "Here, bhikkhus, some samaṇa or brahmin, with the relinquishing of views about the past and the future, through complete lack of resolve upon the fetters of sensual pleasure, and with the surmounting of the rapture of seclusion, unworldly pleasure and neutral feeling, they regard themselves thus: 'I am at peace, I have attained Nibbāna, I am without clinging.'
> "The Tathāgata, bhikkhus, understands this thus: 'This good samaṇa or brahmin, with the relinquishing of views about the past and the future... they regard themselves thus: "I am at peace, I have attained Nibbāna, I am without clinging." Certainly this venerable one asserts the way directed to Nibbāna. Yet this good samaṇa or brahmin still clings, clinging either to a view about the past or to a view about the future or to a fetter of sensual pleasure or to the rapture of seclusion or to unworldly pleasure or to neutral feeling. And when this venerable one regards themselves thus: "I am at peace, I have attained Nibbāna, I am without clinging," that too is declared to be clinging on the part of this good samaṇa or

brahmin. All that is conditioned and thus gross, but there is the cessation of formations. Having understood 'There is this,' seeing the escape from that, the Tathāgata has gone beyond that."
~ M 102.23-4

5.11) Now the Ven. Sāriputta went to visit the Blessed One... As he sat at one side the Blessed One said this to him:
"Sāriputta, you must train yourself thus: In this body together with its consciousness, there shall be no notion of 'I' and 'mine,' no tendency to conceit. Likewise in all external objects there shall be no such notion or tendency. We will abide in the attainment of the heart's release, the release through insight, so that we have no notion of 'I' and 'mine,' no tendency to conceit. That is how you must train yourselves.
"Insofar as a bhikkhu has no such notions, no such tendency... and abides in such attainment... he is called 'A bhikkhu who has cut off craving, broken the bond: one who, by perfect comprehension of conceit, has made an end of dukkha.'
"Moreover, in this connection, Sāriputta, I spoke thus in the chapter on The Goal in (the sutta called) The Questions of Udaya:
"The abandoning of lust and grief,
both these, and sloth's destruction too,
restraint of mental restlessness
and pure tranquility of mind,
the equipoise of wholesome thought –
these I call
'Release by knowledge' and
'The breaking up of ignorance.'"
~ A 3.32

Or the conceits of identity can be quite clumsy and coarse:

5.12) "People get stuck on
'this was made by me,'
equally they attach to
'made by someone else.'
Those who haven't seen this,
don't know it as a barb.

"One who truly sees it,
has taken out the hook,
'I do this,' doesn't rise in them;
nor 'Another does...'

"Humanity is possessed
by conceit – fettered, bound by it –
and spiteful speech spews from their views:
they don't escape saṃsāra."
~ Ud 6.6

5.13) "This is how they attend unwisely: 'Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I become in the future?' Or else they are inwardly perplexed about the present thus: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?'

"When they attend unwisely in this way, one of six views arises in them. The view 'self exists for me' arises in them as true and established; or the view 'no self exists for me' arises in them as true and established; or the view 'I perceive self with self' arises in them as true and established; or the view 'I perceive not-self with self' arises in them as true and established; or the view 'I perceive self with not-self' arises in them as true and established; or else they have some such view as this: 'It is this self of mine that speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions; but this self of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity.' These speculative views, bhikkhus, are called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; they are not freed from suffering, I say."
~ M 2.7-8

Sometimes the Buddha responded to suchlike dilemmas and confusions with careful explanations – e.g., the exquisitely framed example at §11.2 where the Buddha uses the analogy of fire to explain a subtle point to his faithful interlocutor, the wanderer Vacchagotta. On other occasions his response was less verbal but perhaps just as explicit in other ways. Here is an account of such an exchange, again with the perennially inquisitive Vacchagotta.

> 5.14) Then the wanderer Vacchagotta approached the Blessed One... and said to him: "How is it, Master Gotama, is there a self?"
> When this was said, the Blessed One was silent.
> "Then, Master Gotama, is there no self?"
> A second time the Blessed One was silent.
> Then the wanderer Vacchagotta rose from his seat and departed.
> Then, not long after the wanderer Vacchagotta had left, the Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One: "Why is it, venerable sir, that when the Blessed One was questioned by the wanderer Vacchagotta, he did not answer?"
> "If, Ānanda, when I was asked by the wanderer Vacchagotta, 'Is there a self?' I had answered, 'There is a self,' this would have been siding with those samaṇas and brahmins who are eternalists. And if, when I was asked by him, 'Is there no self?' I had answered, 'There is no self,' this would have been siding with those samaṇas and brahmins who are annihilationists.
> "If, Ānanda, when I was asked by the wanderer Vacchagotta, 'Is there a self?' I had answered, 'There is a self,' would this have been consistent on my part with the arising of the knowledge that 'all phenomena are not-self?'"
> "No, venerable sir."
> "And if, when I was asked by him, 'Is there no self?' I had answered, 'There is no self,' the wanderer Vacchagotta, already confused, would have fallen into even greater confusion, thinking, 'It seems that the self I formerly had does not exist now.'"
> ~ S 44.10

In the very first discourse of the Middle Length collection, the Mūlapariyāya Sutta, 'The Root of All Things,' the Buddha makes a very thorough analysis of this error of conceit. He begins:

> 5.15) "Here, bhikkhus, an untaught ordinary person, who has no regard for noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, perceives earth as earth. Having perceived earth as earth, such a one conceives [themself as] earth, they conceive [themselves] in earth, they conceive [themselves apart] from earth, they conceive earth to be 'mine,' they delight in earth. Why is that? Because they have not fully understood it, I say..."

He then continues the theme, applying it to the rest of the Four Elements, through 'beings,' 'gods,' 'Pajāpati,' the Brahmā gods of the Ābhassarā, Subhakiṇṇā and Vehapphalā realms (representing the second, third and fourth jhānas), the 'Overlord' (Abhibhū), the realms of the four formless jhānas, the 'seen,' the 'heard,' the 'sensed,' the 'cognized,' finally reaching 'unity,' 'diversity' and then, to complete the picture:

> "They perceive All as All. Having perceived All as All, they conceive [themselves as] All, they conceive [themselves] in All, they conceive [themselves apart] from All, they conceive All to be 'mine,' they delight in All. Why is that? Because they have not fully understood it, I say.
> "They perceive Nibbāna as Nibbāna. Having perceived Nibbāna as Nibbāna, they conceive [themselves as] Nibbāna, they conceive [themselves] in Nibbāna, they conceive [themselves apart] from Nibbāna, they conceive Nibbāna to be 'mine,' they delight in Nibbāna. Why is that? Because they have not fully understood it, I say..."

The Buddha then goes on to repeat the entire pattern seven times in his effort to outline the training and the goal of the practice. He concludes with:

> "Bhikkhus, the Tathāgata, accomplished and fully enlightened, directly knows earth as earth. Having directly known earth as earth, he does not conceive [himself as] earth, he does not conceive [himself] in earth, he does not conceive [himself apart] from earth, he does not conceive earth to be 'mine,' he does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because he has understood that delight is the root of suffering, and that with being [as condition] there is birth and that for whatever has come to be there is ageing and death. Therefore, bhikkhus, through the complete

> destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up and relinquishing of cravings, the Tathāgata has awakened to supreme, full enlightenment, I say.
> "He directly knows water as water... the All as All... Nibbāna as Nibbāna, he does not conceive [himself as] Nibbāna, he does not conceive [himself] in Nibbāna, he does not conceive [himself] apart [or coming] from Nibbāna, he does not conceive Nibbāna to be 'mine,' he does not delight in Nibbāna. Why is that? Because he has understood that delight is the root of suffering, and that with being [as condition] there is birth and that for whatever has come to be there is ageing and death. Therefore, bhikkhus, through the complete destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up and relinquishing of cravings, the Tathāgata has awakened to supreme, full enlightenment, I say."
> ~ M 1.3-194 (abridged)

When compared to the last response to Vacchagotta, this lengthy explanation might seem to be the very opposite approach. Nonetheless, it produced a similar response. At the end of the discourse the reader is treated to a rare finishing touch: "That is what the Blessed One said but those bhikkhus did not delight in the Blessed One's words."

It is said that the group of monks whom the Buddha was addressing were formerly brahmin priests and that perhaps this dismantlement of the conception of 'being' was too threatening for them to take. In addition, in other situations, even though the deconstruction of the sense of being that the anattā teaching provided might have been approved of, this was not always the end of the matter. For, no matter how hard the Buddha tried to convey that the teaching on anattā was not a philosophical or metaphysical position, but rather skilfull means to free the heart, the teaching was regularly taken in the wrong way – and, not surprisingly, it has been repeatedly misconstrued in the intervening centuries. The following essay is a useful exploration of this principle.

> 5.16) NO-SELF OR NOT-SELF?
> One of the first stumbling blocks in understanding Buddhism is the teaching on anattā, often translated as no-self. This teaching is a stumbling block for two reasons. First, the idea of there being no self doesn't fit well with other Buddhist teachings, such as the doctrine of karma and rebirth: If there's no self, what experiences the results of karma and takes rebirth? Second, it

seems to negate the whole reason for the Buddha's teachings to begin with: If there's no self to benefit from the practice, then why bother? Many books try to answer these questions, but if you look at the Pali Canon you won't find them addressed at all. In fact, the one place where the Buddha was asked point-blank whether or not there was a self, he refused to answer [i.e. §5.14]. When later asked why, he said that to answer either yes, there is a self, or no, there isn't, would be to fall into extreme forms of wrong view that make the path of Buddhist practice impossible. Thus the question should be put aside. To understand what his silence on this question says about the meaning of anattā, we first have to look at his teachings on how questions should be asked and answered, and how to interpret his answers.

The Buddha divided all questions into four classes: those that deserve a categorical (straight yes or no) answer; those that deserve an analytical answer, defining and qualifying the terms of the question; those that deserve a counter-question, putting the ball back in the questioner's court; and those that deserve to be put aside. The last class of question consists of those that don't lead to the end of suffering and stress. The first duty of a teacher, when asked a question, is to figure out which class the question belongs to, and then to respond in the appropriate way. You don't, for example, say yes or no to a question that should be put aside. If you are the person asking the question and you get an answer, you should then determine how far the answer should be interpreted. The Buddha said that there are two types of people who misrepresent him: those who draw inferences from statements that shouldn't have inferences drawn from them, and those who don't draw inferences from those that should.

These are the basic ground rules for interpreting the Buddha's teachings, but if we look at the way most writers treat the anattā doctrine, we find these ground rules ignored. Some writers try to qualify the no-self interpretation by saying that the Buddha denied the existence of an *eternal* self or a *separate* self, but this is to give an analytical answer to a question that the Buddha showed should be put aside. Others try to draw inferences from the few statements in the discourses that seem to imply that there is no self, but it seems safe to assume that if one forces those statements to give an answer to a question that should be put

aside, one is drawing inferences where they shouldn't be drawn. So, instead of answering "no" to the question of whether or not there is a self – interconnected or separate, eternal or not – the Buddha felt that the question was misguided to begin with. Why? No matter how you define the line between 'self' and 'other,' the notion of self involves an element of self-identification and clinging, and thus suffering and stress. This holds as much for an interconnected self, which recognizes no 'other,' as it does for a separate self [see §§7.8-13]; if one identifies with all of nature, one is pained by every felled tree. It also holds for an entirely 'other' universe, in which the sense of alienation and futility would become so debilitating as to make the quest for happiness – one's own or that of others – impossible. For these reasons, the Buddha advised paying no attention to such questions as "Do I exist?" or "Don't I exist?" for however you answer them, they lead to suffering and stress.

To avoid the suffering implicit in questions of 'self' and 'other,' he offered an alternative way of dividing up experience: the four Noble Truths of stress, its cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. These truths aren't assertions; they're categories of experience. Rather than viewing these categories as pertaining to self or other, he said, we should recognize them simply for what they are, in and of themselves, as they are directly experienced, and then perform the duty appropriate to each. Stress should be comprehended, its cause abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed. These duties form the context in which the anattā doctrine is best understood. If you develop the path of virtue, concentration, and discernment to a state of calm well-being and use that calm state to look at experience in terms of the Noble Truths, the questions that occur to the mind are not "Is there a self? What is my self?" but rather "Does holding onto this particular phenomenon cause stress and suffering? Is it really me, myself, or mine? If it's stressful but not really me or mine, why hold on?" These last questions merit straightforward answers, as they then help you to comprehend stress and to chip away at the attachment and clinging – the residual sense of self-identification – that cause stress, until ultimately all traces of self- identification are gone and all that remains is limitless freedom.

> In this sense, the anattā teaching is not a doctrine of no-self, but a not-self strategy for shedding suffering by letting go of its cause, leading to the highest, undying happiness. At that point, questions of self, no-self, and not-self fall aside. Once there's the experience of such total freedom, where would there be any concern about what's experiencing it, or about whether or not it's a self?
> ~ Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 'Noble Strategy,' pp 71-4

This explanation clearly points out that the anattā teaching is simply a means to an end. On a practical level it points to the root delusion, and what to do about it. Here are some of the Buddha's words which both underscore the necessary process and also point out the joyful result of following that process to its completion.

> 5.17) "Contemplation of unattractiveness of the body should be cultivated for the overcoming of sexual desire; loving-kindness should be cultivated for the overcoming of ill will; mindfulness of breathing should be cultivated for the cutting off of discursive thinking; contemplation of impermanence should be cultivated for the dispelling of the conceit 'I am' (asmi-māna). For when one perceives impermanence, Meghiya, the perception of not-self is established. With the perception of not-self, the conceit 'I am' is eliminated, and that is Nibbāna here and now."
> ~ Ud 4.1, A 9.3

> 5.18) "Seclusion is happiness for one content,
> who knows the Dhamma, who has seen;
>
> "Friendship with the world is happiness
> for those restrained toward all beings;
>
> "Dispassion amidst the world is happiness
> for those who have let go of sense desires;
>
> "But the end of the conceit 'I am' –
> that's the greatest happiness of all."
> ~ Ud 2.1

We now move on to the closely related area of attachment to 'being' and 'non-being.' The average reader might well believe that such issues are not the burning concerns of an average day, and only of tangential or academic interest. However, there are numerous subtle ways in which our hearts incline towards the longing to be someone, something, and then towards the longing not to be, not to feel, not to experience...

Does this sound at all familiar? Probably thousands of times a day the heart of the average person tilts towards bhava-taṇhā or vibhava-taṇhā (the former is defined as the yearning to be, to become; the latter embodying the yearning to switch off, to annihilate experience).

It is in the light of this reality that these teachings take on great meaning and practical value – they describe the habits of the heart which are deeply ingrained and which continually drive the wheel of birth and death: enthusiasm and disappointment, the return of the nemesis we have tried to escape, union and bereavement, the results of impulses to "Just get rid of this..."

If we use the reflective capacity of the mind, we begin to see how these teachings map the terrain of such habits quite precisely. They then also point the way to attitudes which will break the imprisoning spell such habits have woven.

> 5.19) "Whatever samaṇas or brahmins have described liberation from being to come about through [love of] being, none, I say, are liberated from being. And whatever samaṇas or brahmins have described escape from being to come about through [love of] non-being, none, I say, have escaped from being. Through attachment to existence (upadhi), suffering is; with all clinging exhausted, suffering is no more.
>
> Whatever states of being there are,
> of any kind, anywhere,
> all are impermanent, pain-haunted
> and subject to change.
> One who sees this as it is
> thus abandons craving for existence,
> without relishing non-existence.
>
> The remainderless fading, cessation, Nibbāna,
> comes with the utter ending of all craving.
> ~ Ud 3.10

> 5.20) This was said by the Lord...
> "Bhikkhus, there are these three kinds of craving. What three? The craving for sensual pleasures, the craving for being, the craving for non-being. These are the three.
>
> "Those fettered by the cuffs of craving,
> delighting in being this or that,
> they're people in the grip of Māra,
> unable to escape his net.
> Such beings continue in saṃsāra,
> round and round from birth to death.
>
> For those who've gone beyond this thirst,
> being this or that has lost its glamour;
> for whom the outflows have all ceased,
> though in the world, they've gone beyond."
> ~ Iti 58

There were many religious seekers at the time of the Buddha who held fundamentally materialistic, nihilistic views and the Buddha was often reckoned as one of them, although he categorically denied this.

> 5.21) "[I] have been baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly misrepresented by some samaṇas and brahmins thus: 'The Samaṇa Gotama is one who leads astray; he teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing being.' As I am not, and I do not proclaim this, I have been baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly misrepresented... Bhikkhus, both formerly and now, what I teach is dukkha and the cessation of dukkha."
> ~ M 22.37

He also described, in the same discourse, how it was that people gave rise to such misapprehensions:

> 5.22) "Here, bhikkhu, someone has the view: 'This is self, this the universe; after death I shall be permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change; I shall endure as long as eternity.'

> They hear the Tathāgata or a disciple of the Tathāgata teaching the Dhamma for the elimination of all standpoints, biases, obsessions, adherences and underlying tendencies, for the stilling of all formations, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the destruction of craving, for dispassion, for cessation, for Nibbāna. They think thus: 'So I shall be annihilated! So I shall perish! So I shall be no more!' Then they sorrow, grieve and lament, they weep beating their breast and become distraught."
> ~ M 22.20

And thereby hangs a tale…
Even though the Buddha said:

> 5.23) "That one should see Nibbāna as unsatisfactory, as dukkha, and for that conviction to be in accordance with Dhamma (anuloma-khanti), that I say is impossible… But to see Nibbāna as free from dukkha and for that conviction to be in accordance with Dhamma, that I say is possible."
> ~ A 6.101

It seems that it was not uncommon for people, particularly those of a lustful or life-affirming bent, to have had a negative reaction to the Buddha's teaching – even in his own lifetime and face-to-face. Since those days this misinterpretation of the teaching has been a recurrent theme.

In the preceding discourses (§§5.21 & 5.22) the Buddha outlines this presumption of nihilism as a mistaken view of his teaching and then, through the contemplations on impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, he leads his listeners to the path of Awakening.

Nevertheless, despite this clear description of the genuine path to happiness, the bhikkhu Ariṭṭha (who had occasioned this teaching after the Buddha had refuted his assertion that the pursuit of sensual pleasure was not an obstacle to enlightenment) was left "silent, dismayed with shoulders drooping and head down, glum and with nothing to say."

It is because of the deep-rooted views of the sensory world as being solid, and the source of happiness, that the suggestion of non-attachment to it, or of its essential emptiness, is so threatening. And, if that which we have held to be real and of value is revealed as ephemeral and not ours, what can we depend on? Where is any reality? The heart can become disoriented and feel fundamentally bereft; hence the cry of anguish that the Buddha describes so accurately above.

Here a few wise voices of the current age reflect on this same theme:

> 5.24) Nibbāna is often held to be the ultimate goal in Buddhism, and yet it is rather ill-defined. It is considered to be remote, indicative of a superhuman vision that sees the illusory nature of the world, and hence, is free from grieving about its misfortunes. For many people, this gives Nibbāna about as much appeal as an anaesthetic – and a difficult-to-obtain one at that.
> ~ Ajahn Sucitto, 'The Dawn of the Dhamma,' p 97

> 5.25) "The worldly way is to do things for a reason, to get some return, but in Buddhism we do things without any gaining idea. The world has to understand things in terms of cause and effect, but the Buddha teaches us to go above and beyond cause and effect. His wisdom was to go above cause, beyond effect; to go above birth and beyond death; to go above happiness and beyond suffering. Think about it: there's nowhere to stay. We people live in a home. To leave home and go where there is no home – we don't know how to do that, because we've always lived with becoming, with clinging. If we can't cling we don't know what to do."
> ~ Ajahn Chah, 'No Abiding,' in 'Food for the Heart,' p 316

So, in terms of experience in this life, non-attachment to the sense-world and the prospect of Nibbāna can seem a little off-putting. When lives after this one are also considered, from the same life-affirming position, the appeal can wane even further.

> 5.26) "So most people don't want to go to Nibbāna, there's nothing there; nothing at all. Look at the roof and the floor here. The upper extreme is the roof, that's a 'becoming.' The lower extreme is the floor, and that's another 'becoming.' But in the empty space between the floor and the roof there's nowhere to stand. One could stand on the roof, or stand on the floor, but not on that empty space. Where there is no becoming, that's where there's emptiness, and, to put it bluntly, we say that Nibbāna is this emptiness. People hear this and they back up a bit, they don't want to go. They're afraid they won't see their children or relatives."
> ~ ibid, pp 316-7, (adapted)

It is interesting to note that in the Māgandiya Sutta (M 75), a discourse addressed to a dedicated life-affirmer who was of the understanding that the health and well-being of his physical body was Nibbāna (§1.14), the Buddha describes how uninterested in earthly sense pleasures one of the devas would be, since their experiences of pleasure are so much more refined and acute. He then goes on to say to Māgandiya that the reason why he, the Buddha, has renounced sense pleasures is simply because:

> 5.27) "There is, Māgandiya, a delight apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, which surpasses divine bliss. Since I take delight in that, I do not envy what is inferior, nor do I delight therein."
> ~ M 75.12

It was not often that the Buddha used this kind of phraseology – intimating as it does, a heart motivated by the love of pleasure, albeit a supra-divine bliss. He employed it here because it was the currency that had value for his interlocutor and it succeeded in leading Māgandiya, soon after this exchange, to arahantship. The vast majority of the time the Buddha preferred to use 'dukkha and the ending of dukkha' language, as he knew that, ultimately, this would bring the most beings to full realization and unshakeable freedom of the heart.

Another example of the misapprehension of this approach is found in an incident which occurred early on in the Buddha's teaching career, when he met the wanderer Dīghanakha ('Long-nails').

> 5.28) "Master Gotama, my doctrine and view is this: 'Nothing is acceptable to me.'"
> "This view of yours, Aggivessana, 'Nothing is acceptable to me' – is not at least that view acceptable to you?"
> "If this view of mine were acceptable to me, Master Gotama, it would all be the same, it would all be the same."

One can almost see the dusty, long-nailed and dreadlocked fellow wagging his head and looking at the floor, there in the Boar's Cave on Vulture Peak. After a few explanatory sentences the Buddha then says:

> "Aggivessana, there are some samaṇas and brahmins whose doctrine and view is this: 'Everything is acceptable to me.' There

> are some samaṇas and brahmins whose doctrine and view is this: 'Nothing is acceptable to me.'... Among these, the view of those samaṇas and brahmins whose doctrine and view is 'Everything is acceptable to me,' is close to lust, close to bondage, close to delighting, close to holding, close to clinging. The view of those samaṇas and brahmins whose doctrine and view is 'Nothing is acceptable to me,' is close to non-lust, close to non-bondage, close to non-delighting, close to non-holding, close to non-clinging."
>
> When this was said, the wanderer Dīghanakha remarked: "Master Gotama commends my view! Master Gotama commends my view!"
>
> ~ M 74.2-5

The Buddha, however, then disabuses Dīghanakha of the idea that he's totally in the right; he goes on to point out how clinging to views inevitably causes conflict. He then describes a process of meditation on feeling that will lead to liberation. While listening to this discourse Dīghanakha realized stream-entry.

Meanwhile, the Ven. Sāriputta, who had been ordained as a disciple of the Buddha for a fortnight at this point and was standing behind his seat fanning him, realized complete enlightenment then and there.

In another discourse the Buddha employs a memorable image to describe the limiting nature of nihilistic attitudes and how aversion can be just as strong a bond as attraction:

> 5.29) "The Tathāgata, bhikkhus, understands this thus: 'These good samaṇas and brahmins who describe the annihilation, destruction and extermination of an existing being [at death], through fear of personality and disgust with personality, keep running and circling around that same personality. Just as a dog bound by a leash tied to a firm post or pillar keeps on running and circling around that same post or pillar; so too, these good samaṇas and brahmins, through fear of personality and disgust with personality, keep running and circling around that same personality. All that is conditioned and thus gross, but there is the cessation of formations. Having known 'There is this,' seeing the escape from it all, the Tathāgata has gone beyond it."
>
> ~ M 102.12

Perhaps the finest expression of the causes of these two strands of wrong view, eternalism and annihilationism, comes in a passage from the Itivuttaka.

> 5.30) This was said by the Lord...
> "Bhikkhus, held by two kinds of views, some devas and human beings hold back and some overreach; only those with vision see.
> "And how, bhikkhus, do some hold back? Some devas and humans enjoy being, delight in being, are satisfied with being. When the Dhamma is taught to them for the cessation of being, their minds do not enter into it or acquire confidence in it or settle upon it or become resolved upon it. Thus, bhikkhus, do some hold back.
> "How, bhikkhus, do some overreach? Now some are troubled, ashamed and disgusted by this very same quality of being and they rejoice in [the idea of] non-being, asserting: 'Good sirs, when the body perishes at death, this self is annihilated and destroyed and does not exist any more – this is true peace, this is excellent, this is reality!' Thus, bhikkhus, do some overreach.
> "How, bhikkhus, do those with vision see? Herein one sees what has come to be as having come to be. Having seen it thus, one practises the course for turning away, for dispassion, for the cessation of what has come to be. Thus, bhikkhus, do those with vision see."
> ~ Iti 49

It is important to note that the last paragraph more describes a method of meditation practice than merely another philosophical position. These various teachings point to the fact that the answer to the conundrum of being and non-being is to be found in reshaping the issue, mostly by the way in which it is seen. The advice given in the last passage closely matches the practice of vipassanā (insight) meditation: this is comprised of, firstly, the calm and attentive observation of the arising of all patterns of experience.

Secondly, it involves the seeing of all such patterns through the reflective lens of anicca-dukkha-anattā (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self). Lastly, in the culmination of the process, there is the remainderless relinquishment of all experience. There is a complete acceptance of all that arises and no confusion about the fact that all patterns of experience are of the same dependent, insubstantial nature.

> 5.31) “Whatever form… feeling… perception… mental formations … consciousness there are: past, future or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near – all should be seen as they really are through true wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.’”
> ~ MV 1.6, S 22.59, Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta

The evidence for ‘being’ (the arising of things) is seen and seen through, the evidence for ‘non-being’ (the cessation of things) is seen and seen through; both are thus let go of through perfect understanding, and the heart experiences release.

Another of the highly significant expressions of this same balancing point of the Middle Way comes in the Collection on Causation in the Saṃyutta Nikāya:

> 5.32) At Sāvatthi. Then the Venerable Kaccānagotta approached the Blessed One, paid respects to him, sat down to one side, and said to him, “Venerable sir, it is said, ‘Right View, Right View.’ In what way, venerable sir, is there Right View?”
> “This world, Kaccāyana, for the most part depends upon the dualism of the notions of existence and non-existence. But for one who sees the origin of the world as it really is with right understanding, there is no notion of non-existence with regard to the world. And for one who sees the cessation of the world as it really is with right understanding, there is no notion of existence with regard to the world.
> “This world, Kaccāyana, is for the most part shackled by bias, clinging, and insistence. But one such as this [with Right View], instead of becoming engaged, instead of clinging – instead of taking a stand about ‘my self’ through such a bias, clinging, mental standpoint, adherance and underlying tendency – such a one has no perplexity or doubt that what arises is only dukkha arising, and what ceases is only dukkha ceasing. In this their knowledge is independent of others. It is in this way, Kaccāyana, that there is Right View.
> “‘All exists,’ Kaccāyana, this is one extreme, ‘All does not exist,’ this is the other extreme. Without veering towards either of these extremes the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma by the Middle Way: With ignorance as condition, volitional formations come to be; with volitional formations as condition, consciousness comes to

> be... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.
> "But with the remainderless fading away, cessation and non-arising of ignorance there comes the cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of volitional formations, when there are no volitional formations, there is the cessation of consciousness, consciousness does not come to be... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering."
> ~ S 12.15, S 22.90

It has been proposed (by Kalupahana, in 'Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way') that this humble sutta was the principal seed for the great, early Indian Buddhist philosopher Ācariya Nāgārjuna's masterpiece, the Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā – 'Treatise on the Root of the Middle Way.' It is certainly the only discourse of the ancient Canon that is mentioned by name therein; in point of fact it is the only discourse mentioned at all.

By way of expansion on this area, here are some of Ācariya Nāgārjuna's own incisive insights on being, non-being and causality:

> 5.33) Investigation of Essences
>
> 1. It is unreasonable for an essence to arise from causes and conditions. Whatever essence arose from causes and conditions would be something that has been made.
> 2. How is it possible for there to be 'an essence' which has been made? Essences are not contrived and not dependent on anything else.
> 3. If an essence does not exist, how can the thingness of the other exist. [For] the essence of the thingness of the other is said to be the thingness of the other.
> 4. Apart from an essence and the thingness of the other, what things are there? If essences and thingnesses of others existed, things would be established.
> 5. If things were not established, non-things would not be established. [When] a thing becomes something else, people say that it is a non-thing.
> 6. Those who view essence, thingness of the other, things and non-things do not see the suchness in the teaching of the awakened.

> 7. Through knowing things and non-things, the Buddha negated both existence and non-existence in his 'Advice to Kātyāyana'
> 8. If [things] existed essentially, they would not come to non-existence. It is never the case that an essence could become something else.
> 9. If essences did not exist, what could become something else? Even if essences existed, what could become something else?
> 10. 'Existence' is the grasping at permanence; 'non-existence' is the view of annihilation. Therefore, the wise do not dwell, in existence or non-existence.
> 11. 'Since that which exists by its essence is non-existent' is [the view of] permanence. 'That which arose before is now non-existent,' leads to [the view of] annihilation.
> ~ Ācariya Nāgārjuna, Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā, Ch.15. (Stephen Batchelor trans.)

As with many of the instances where the Buddha invokes dependent origination as the resolution for dualities such as self and other, eternalism and annihilationism, etc. (a large proportion of these are found in the Nidāna Saṃyutta, 'The Collection on Causation,' S 12), Nāgārjuna employs the same method throughout his treatise. He illustrates again and again how the dependently originated quality of all things is the basis for their emptiness, (suññatā).

His exposition is a poetic exploration of the relationship between emptiness, dependent origination and the Middle Way. It is a work of great philosophical depth yet its language throughout is extremely spare, diamond-like in its purity and sharpness; it is also a work that stands close to the central teachings of the Buddha and is thus capable of usefully informing practitioners of both Northern and Southern schools.

Returning to the Pali once again, here are the Buddha's words to a former teacher of his, the brahmā god Baka, whom he was endeavouring to help break through the conceit of eternal being:

> 5.34) "Having seen fear in every mode of being
> and in seeking for non-being,
> I did not affirm any mode of being
> nor did I cling to any delight therein."
> ~ M 49.27

In a comparable passage, Māra comes to visit the nun Vajirā and tries to throw her off her path of spiritual practice by introducing doubts into her mind:

> 5.35) "By whom has this been created?
> Where is the maker of this being?
> From whence has this being arisen?
> Where will this being cease?"

Then the bhikkhunī Vajirā, having understood, "This is Māra, the Evil One," replied to him in verses:

> "Why do you presume 'a being' is here?
> Māra, is that your real view?
> This is just a heap of forms:
> no 'being' can be apprehended.
>
> "Just as, with all parts assembled,
> the name of 'chariot' can be used,
> so, while the khandhas keep on going,
> the convention of 'a being' pertains.
>
> "What comes to be is only dukkha,
> only dukkha remains, and falls away.
> Nothing but dukkha comes to be,
> nothing but dukkha fades away."
> ~ S 5.10

As a final word for this chapter, here is the complete 'spiritual biography' that Ajahn Chah wrote for the ecclesiastical authorities when pressed repeatedly by them to provide one, so that the King of Thailand could award him an honorary title.

> 5.36) Sometimes there's thunder and there's no rain; sometimes there's rain and there's no thunder.
> ~ Ajahn Chah

6

ATAMMAYATĀ: "NOT MADE OF THAT"

AS THE FINAL PART OF OUR INVESTIGATION INTO THE conditioned world we will take a look at 'Atammayatā,' a term from the Pali Canon that has become somewhat obscure over the centuries. However, it defines a quality crucial to the realization of spiritual freedom.

The word literally means 'not made of that.' But it can be rendered in many different ways, giving it a variety of subtle shades of meaning. Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (in their translation of the Majjhima Nikāya) render it as 'non-identification' – focusing on the subject side of the equation. Other translators have it as 'non-fashioning' or 'unconcoctability' – thus hinting more at the object dimension of it. Either way, it refers primarily to the quality of experience prior to, or without, a subject/object duality arising.

As described in the comprehensive essay by Bhikkhu Santikaro, which comprises the first of our passages in this chapter, it was Ajahn Buddhadāsa who was largely responsible for bringing this term into the public eye in recent years, although it should also be noted that Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, in his influential little book 'The Magic of the Mind,' first published in 1974, gave the subject of Atammayatā significant attention (e.g. see §6.7).

Ajahn Buddhadāsa spent the last three or four years of his life discoursing on this word – proclaiming it to be "The ultimate Buddhist concept." He felt it to be of such significance and subtlety that he placed it at the head of his list of nine insights, which he saw as comprising all the dimensions of the practice of wisdom. In a play on the Thai word dtā, meaning 'eye,' he described these nine modes of contemplation (whose Pali names all end in -tā) as being the 'eyes' through which to view the very nature of all experience. Atammayatā is described as "the final divorce" from the deluded sense of 'I' and 'mine.'

6.1) ATAMMAYATĀ: THE REBIRTH OF A LOST WORD:

The term Atammayatā cannot be found in the Pali Text Society

Dictionary. Readers will find it difficult to discover references to it in scholarly works, whether they come from West or East. The meditation masters of Tibet, Burma or Zen do not seem to be interested in it. Mention it to most Buddhists and they will not know what you are talking about. Yet there is clear evidence in the Pali Canon that the Buddha gave this word significant meaning. Currently, one of Thailand's most influential monks is teaching that it is "the highest word in Buddhism, the final sword of Buddhism."

Atammayatā appears in a number of Pali suttas and each context suggests that the term has important meaning. The traditional commentators' ... standard explanation, although vague, describes it as the awakened state of the Arahant, or fully-awakened, perfected being.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, from Suan Mokkhabalarama in southern Siam, first took note of this word about thirty years ago. The contexts in which he found Atammayatā convinced him that its meaning is important. As with other terms and teachings found in the Tipiṭaka, he was careful to look further than the orthodox grammarians, pedants, and pundits. He searched for a spiritual meaning on the deepest level possible.

We can only speculate as to why Atammayatā was left out of the Pali Text Society Dictionary. Surely not because it is impossible to decipher. A literal analysis gives us: a (not), ta (that), maya (to make, create, or produce), and tā (the state of being). Thus, Atammayatā may be translated as "the state of not being made up by, or made up from, that (thing or condition)."

The meaning becomes clearer if we recognize that maya is a synonym for saṅkhāra (to concoct, compound, or condition). Atammayatā is 'unconcoctability,' a state of mind independent of the objects and conditions of experience. Fully conscious and aware, this mind is not affected by the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion. Thus, the concept is close in meaning to the adjective visaṅkhāra, which describes the unconditioned state of Nibbāna. Clearly, Atammayatā is something Buddhists should be aware of.

Why does Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu consider Atammayatā so important? In the Saḷāyatanavibhanga Sutta (M 137) the Buddha

describes a spiritual progression carried out by "relying on this, to give up that." Relying on the pleasure, pain, and equanimity associated with renunciation, one gives up the pleasure and pain associated with worldliness. Relying on singular or one-pointed equanimity (ekaggatā-upekkhā), one gives up many-sided or multifaceted equanimity (nānatta-upekkhā). Relying on Atammayatā, one gives up ekaggatā-upekkhā.

In this Sutta, nānatta-upekkhā is explained as "equanimity toward forms, sounds, odors, tastes, touches, and mind-objects," which implies the four meditative states known as the 'rūpa-jhāna.' Ekaggatā-upekkhā is explained as "equanimity dependent upon the four immaterial absorptions (arūpa-jhāna)." To more easily understand what this means, we may compare it with the common Buddhist hierarchy of the sensual (kāma-), pure material (rūpa-), and non-material (arūpa-) realms. The ordinary worldling or 'Thickster' (puthujjana) clings to sensual experiences due to craving for sensual pleasures. One gets free of sensuality by relying on pure materiality, that is, steady concentration upon material objects (rūpa-jhāna). Pure materiality is abandoned by relying on the arūpa-jhāna. Finally, these exalted states of consciousness are abandoned through Atammayatā. In the Sappurisa Sutta (M 113), the Buddha describes qualities of the 'good person' (sappurisa) who avoids indulging in and goes beyond the eight jhāna through Atammayatā. There is liberation from the āsava (eruptions), which is full awakening. The Buddha is reiterating his message that final liberation cannot be found in the temporary peace and bliss of deep meditative states – in any conditioned state or thing, for that matter. Atammayatā is given precedence over the most sublime experiences that humanity can attain. Further, Atammayatā, rather than mystical states, is offered as the means to liberation.

Upekkhā is the highest of the seven bojjhaṅga (factors of awakening). When the seven factors are developed successfully, they lead to the penetration of the object on which they are focused. Penetration, or direct spiritual experience, means awakening to and deeply realizing the true nature of things. Yet, the above sutta tells us that Atammayatā takes the spiritual cultivator beyond even upekkhā. The Buddha is saying that even

upekkhā is a state that can be clung to, thus preventing liberation. Atammayatā frees upekkhā, as well as the other six factors and any wholesome dhamma that aids liberation from clinging and grasping. The mind with Atammayatā is not clinging and grasping. The mind with Atammayatā is not conconcoted by and does not rest in any state of mind, all of which are impermanent, undependable, oppressive, uncontrollable, and unownable, that is, void of selfhood.

LAST WORD OF BUDDHISM

Why does Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu call Atammayatā the "last word and final sword of Buddhism"? Based on the above interpretation, he puts Atammayatā at the transition point between the dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa (insights into the reality, of nature) and the Nibbānañāṇa (insights regarding liberation and the realization of Nibbāna). He explains this with a list of nine eyes (the Thai meaning of -tā) or insights. The nine dtā, or ñāṇa, are:

aniccatā	impermanence
dukkhatā	unsatisfactoriness
anattatā	not-selfhood, selflessness
dhammaṭṭhitatā	naturalness
dhammaniyamatā	lawfulness
idappaccayatā	conditionality
suññatā	voidness
tathatā	thusness
atammayatā	unconcoctability

The realization of these facts about the reality of nature leads to the fruits of liberation, which can be described by the following ñāṇa (insight knowledge or realizations):

nibbidā	disenchantment
virāga	fading away of attachment
nirodha	quenching of dukkha
vimutti	release (liberation)
visuddhi	purity
Nibbāna	coolness (the spiritual goal)

The first list of insights describes an active penetration progressively deeper into the reality of conditioned things. The

> later list describes the results of that realization. The insight of Atammayatā is the realization that there is no conditioned thing, object, or state that can be depended upon. Contrary to the way we have learned to 'see' things, they are powerless to concoct or affect us. They have no power to make us happy, safe, free from death, or whatever else we might desire. Then why get concocted by them through foolishly relying upon them? From this realization liberation naturally follows.
>
> ATAMMAYATĀ IN PRACTICE
>
> ...Atammayatā ... is a way of understanding the reality of conditioned things. When insight progressively deepens through the nine 'eyes,' then one realizes that there is nothing deserving of being concocted, affected, manipulated, or cooked and seasoned by us. By cultivating this understanding, human beings may liberate themselves from ignorance, from their attachments, from conflict and misery.
>
> The third and highest use of Atammayatā is to signify the state of mind that is totally free, independent, liberated. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu prefers to describe this state as being "above and beyond positive or negative." Human beings instinctually feel and perceive all experience as either positive or negative. This leads to evaluating and judging those experiences, which turns into liking and disliking those experiences, which in turn fosters craving, attachment, and selfishness. Thus arises dukkha (misery, pain, dissatisfaction). The mind that has gone beyond positive and negative cannot be pulled into the conditioned arising (paṭicca-samuppāda) of dukkha. Thus, Atammayatā in this, its most proper sense, describes the reality of the Arahant, the worthy undefiled one.
>
> ~ Santikaro Bhikkhu, adapted from 'Evolution/Liberation,' 1989

The references to Atammayatā in the Pali Canon are few, here are the two above quoted passages from the Majjhima Nikāya as examples.

> 6.2) "A person who is not truly good... enters and remains in the first jhāna. They notice, 'I have gained the attainment of first

> jhāna.' They exalt themselves for that attainment of first jhāna and they disparage others. This is a quality of a person who is not truly good.
> "The truly good person notices – 'The Blessed One has spoken of non-identification (non-fabrication) even with regard to the attainment of the first jhāna; *for however they conceive it, the fact is ever other than that*.' So, making non-identification their focal point, they neither exalt themselves for that attainment of the first jhāna nor do they disparage others. This is the quality of a person who is truly good. [Similarly through all the jhānas.]"
> ~ M 113.21

The clause italicised above is a very famous and much discussed phrase in Theravāda literature; it appears in a number of places in the Canon. The Pali original is: Yena yena hi maññanti, tato taṃ hoti aññathā ti. Discussed extensively in 'Concept and Reality,' by Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, it is also quoted at §4.1.

> 6.3) "And what, bhikkhus, is equanimity that is unified, based on unity? There is equanimity regarding the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, the base of no-thingness, and the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This, bhikkhus, is equanimity that is unified, based on unity.
> "Here, bhikkhus, by depending and relying on equanimity that is unified, based on unity, abandon and surmount equanimity that is diversified, based on diversity. It is thus this is abandoned; it is thus this is surmounted.
> "Bhikkhus, by depending and relying on non-identification, abandon and surmount equanimity that is unified, based on unity. It is thus this is abandoned; it is thus this is surmounted.
> "So it was in reference to this that it was said: 'Therein, by depending on this, abandon that.'"
> ~ M 137.19-20

To help develop a clearer sense of what this term is pointing to, it might be helpful to explore its etymology a little more deeply:

> 6.4) [I]n the Vedanta... to be wholly and exclusively aware of brahman was at the same time to *be* brahman... The origins of

> this idea seem to lie in a theory of sense perception in which the grasping hand supplies a dominant analogy. It takes the shape of what it apprehends. Vision was similarly explained: the eye sends out some kind of ray which takes the shape of what we see and comes back with it. Similarly thought: a thought conforms to its object. This idea is encapsulated in the term tanmayatā, 'consisting of that': that the thought of the gnostic or meditator becomes con-substantial with the thing realized.
> ~ Richard Gombrich, 'Metaphor, Allegory, Satire,' in 'How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings,' pp 86-7

That is to say, with the opposite quality, A-tammayatā, the mind's 'energy' does not go out to the object and occupy it. It neither makes an objective 'thing' or a subjective 'observer' knowing it; hence 'non-identification' refers to the subjective aspect and 'non-fabrication' mostly to the objective.

The reader should also carefully bear in mind the words "The origins of this idea…" and not take the Vedic concept and imagery as representing the Buddhist use of the word entirely accurately. In the state of Atammayatā, in its Buddhist usage, there is no actual 'becoming con-substantial' with the thing that is being known; it is more that the deluded identification of the mind with the object is being dispelled (see also §6.7).

One helpful way of understanding Atammayatā's role and significance is to relate it to the other two items in the final triad of the nine insights as outlined by Ajahn Buddhadāsa. These three qualities describe the upper reaches of spiritual refinement: suññatā – voidness or emptiness; tathatā – thusness or suchness; Atammayatā – non-identification or 'not-thatness.' The three qualities speak to the nature of experience when many of the coarser defilements have fallen away. When the qualities of emptiness and suchness are considered, even though the conceit of identity might already have been seen through, there can still remain subtle traces of clinging; clinging to the idea of an objective world being known by a subjective knowing – even though no sense of 'I' is discernible at all.

There can be the feeling of a 'this' which is knowing a 'that,' and either saying "Yes" to it, in the case of suchness, or "No" in the case of emptiness.

Atammayatā is the closure of that whole domain, expressing the insight that "There is no 'that.'" It is the genuine collapse of both the illusion of separateness of subject and object and also of the discrimination between phenomena as being somehow substantially different from each other. As it has been written:

> 6.5) Do not remain in the dualistic state;
> avoid such pursuits carefully.
> If there is even a trace
> of this and that, of right and wrong,
> the Mind-essence will be lost in confusion.
> ~ Hsin Hsin Ming, Verses of the Third Ch'an Patriarch
> (Richard B. Clarke trans.)

Of the ten obstacles or fetters (saṃyojanā) that stand in the way of enlightenment, the penultimate is uddhacca – restlessness. In this light, we can reflect that Atammayatā represents the overcoming of this ninth fetter. The restlessness to which this refers is not the fidgeting of the uncomfortable meditator; it is the subtlest of feelings that there might be something better over there or just in the future; a feeling that 'that' (which is out of reach) might have more value in some way than 'this.' It is the ever-so-insidious addiction to time and its promises. This is why Ajahn Chah would say such things as: "A samaṇa (religious seeker) has no future." Furthermore, if there is no 'that' then the nature of 'this' must necessarily be reformulated – so that we are not just left with a subject devoid of its object.

Atammayatā is the utter abandonment of this root delusion: one sees that in ultimate truth there is no time, no self, no here and no there. So rather than "Be here now" as a spiritual exhortation, perhaps instead we should say: "Let go of identity, space and time," or: "Realize unlocated, timeless selflessness." Needless to say, the conceptual mind falls flat when trying to conjure up an image for such a reality but that is to be expected. We are consciously leaving the realm of the conceivable, and the purpose of this book is to provide something of a map for those regions where the buses of reason and imagination do not run.

It is also quite possible that, on reading these passages on Atammayatā, the mind wants to grasp it as "some thing to get so that 'I' won't be so deluded" rather than seeing it as a restraining of the habitual outward movement of the mind that comes as a result of disenchantment and dispassion. It is always necessary to be aware of the way that ignorance causes even the means of transcendence to become an obstacle, if the mind does not handle it wisely.

Perhaps one of the simplest, clearest and most practical expressions of the principle of Atammayatā – 'not-made-of-that-ness' – has come down to us from the teachings of Luang Pu Dun, a direct disciple of Ven. Ajahn Mun and one of the great lights of Dhamma in Asia in recent years. Here is his reformulation of the Four Noble Truths, based on the depiction of ignorance (avijjā) as the

fundamental error of the mind attempting to 'go out' and pursue 'thatness' in the form of perceptions, feelings and ideas. In reflecting on these four formulae it might be helpful to recollect the analogy of the grasping hand, mentioned in §6.4, reaching out to become con-substantial with its object and then returning with it.

> 6.6) The mind that goes out in order to satisfy its moods is the Cause of Suffering (II);
> The result that comes from the mind going out in order to satisfy its moods is Suffering (I);
> The mind seeing the mind clearly is the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (IV);
> The result of the mind seeing the mind clearly is the Cessation of Suffering (III).
> ~ Luang Pu Dun, 'Atulo,' collected teachings compiled by Phra Bodhinandamuni

Next we have some words from Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, picking up a variety of terms related to Atammayatā. Each of the words he outlines is worthy of a pause to consider, and to contemplate its sense and implications.

> 6.7) The process of becoming is thus shown to be perpetually going on within the mind of the saṃsāric individual who identifies himself with sense-data under the proliferating tendencies towards craving, conceits and views (the three main āsavā) [these are more usually referred to as the papañca-dhammas]. This identification is implied by the term tammayatā (lit. 'of-that-ness') and one who resorts to it, is called tammayo – one who is 'made-of-that' or is 'of-that-(stuff).' Since the perpetual process of becoming in the psychological realm is necessarily followed by birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, grief and despair in every specific instance of short-lived identification, an insight into the law of Dependent Arising provides one with the key to the entire gamut of saṃsāric experience...
> This penetrative insight into the arising and cessation of phenomena dispels all doubts as to the speculative problems of absolute existence and non-existence, of unity and plurality etc., and the mind is brought to rest in the 'middle' – though, paradoxically, it now rests on nothing. 'Thingness' has completely faded away,

> so much so that craving finds 'no-thing' to grasp at. Instead of an attempt at identification (tammayatā) impelled by craving, a detached contemplation of the Norm of Suchness (tathatā) sets in. With this emancipation of the mind, one's attitude towards the world with all its vicissitudes, becomes one of 'Such-like-ness' (tāditā) – of aloofness (atammayatā) and he deserves to be called the 'Such-One' or the 'Such-like One' (tādi, tādiso).
>
> "That ardent one,
> who touched the destruction of birth
> by overcoming Māra –
> by vanquishing the Ender –
> that wise sage, the Such-like One,
> the Knower of the World,
> is unattached (atammayo)
> in regard to all phenomena."
>
> Pasayha māraṃ abhibhuyya antakaṃ
> Yo ca phusi jātikkhayaṃ padhānavā
> So tādiso lokavidū sumedho
> Sabbesu dhammesu atammayo muni
> ~A 1.150
> Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, 'The Magic of the Mind,' pp 49 & 52

The discourse he is commenting on, the Kālakārāma Sutta, is very brief, although highly potent. It is included here in its entirety.

> 6.8) At one time the Blessed One was staying at Sāketa, in Kālaka's monastery. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus" – "Venerable sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this:
> "Bhikkhus, in this world with its gods, Māras and Brahmās, among its population of recluses and brahmins, gods and humans – whatsoever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after and pondered over by the mind – all that do I know... whatsoever is seen... pondered over by the mind – all that have I fully understood; all that is known to the Tathāgata, but the Tathāgata has not taken his stand upon it.

> "If I were to say: 'Whatsoever in the world... all that I do not know' – that would be a falsehood in me. If I were to say: 'I both know it and know it not' – that would be a falsehood in me. If I were to say: 'I neither know it nor know it not' – it would be a fault in me.
>
> "Thus, bhikkhus, the Tathāgata does not conceive of a visible thing as apart from sight; he does not conceive of an unseen; he does not conceive of a 'thing-to-be-seen'; he does not conceive about a seer. He does not conceive of an audible... a thing to be sensed ... a cognizable thing as apart from cognition; he does not conceive of an uncognized; he does not conceive of a 'thing-worth-cognizing'; he does not conceive about one who cognizes.
>
> "Thus, bhikkhus, the Tathāgata being Suchlike (tādi) in regard to all phenomena seen, heard, sensed and cognized, is Thus. Moreover, there is none other greater or more excellent than one who is Thus, I declare.
>
> Whatever's seen, heard, sensed or clung to,
> is known as truth by other folk;
> Amidst those who're entrenched in views,
> one Thus holds none as true or false.
>
> The barb which hooks, impales the world,
> has been discerned well in advance:
> 'I know, I see, this is the truth,'
> Tathāgatas do not cling thus."
>
> ~ A 4.24

The terms 'thing-worth-seeing, -hearing, -cognizing etc.' are pointing to the habit we have of imputing inherent value or substance to perceptions, thoughts and emotions. Without such imputation they do not possess any such solidity or worth.

Tradition has it that five hundred of those listening attained arahantship and there were five earthquakes during the course of the exposition. This short teaching also became of great significance in the centuries after the Buddha's time – it was used by the Elder Mahārakkhita, under the auspices of King Asoka's missionary endeavours, to instruct the Yonakas (Greeks) in their home country.

All the various passages quoted so far in this chapter describe the nature of Atammayatā and its related qualities but perhaps the questions remain: how is this best

to be realized? And how can this depth of insight be developed? A text that points directly to this issue, and one of the most useful meditation teachings in the entire Pali Canon, is to be found in the Madhupiṇḍika Sutta; there, Ven. Mahā-Kaccāna says:

> 6.9) "Dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is sense-contact. With sense-contact as condition there is feeling. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates. With such conceptual proliferation (papañca) as the source, the heart is beset by mental perceptions and notions characterized by the prolific tendency with respect to past, future and present forms cognizable through the eye. [So too with ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.]"

The solution to this cascade of trouble is that:

> "[I]f nothing is found there to delight in, welcome, and hold to, this is the end of the underlying tendencies to lust, aversion, views, doubt, conceit, desire for being and ignorance [the seven anusaya]. This is the end of resorting to weapons, quarrels, brawls, disputes, recrimination, malice and false speech; here these harmful, unwholesome states cease without remainder."
> ~ M 18.16-19, (abridged)

This is to say that if, with mindfulness and wisdom, the tendency to 'go out' into perceptions, thoughts and emotions is restrained, and one just allows seeing to be seeing, hearing to be hearing etc., the whole papañca-drama does not get launched in the first place. The heart then rests at ease, open and clear; all perceptions conventionally labelled as 'myself' or 'the world' are seen as transparent, if convenient, fictions.

When there is insufficient mindfulness and wisdom, the mind 'goes out' and attaches to its perceptions and moods, the result of which is the experience of 'me being pressured by life.' Both an apparently solid self and a solid world have been unconsciously created, and the friction between the two is the dukkha that we find ourselves running from so regularly and ineffectively. Trying to find a 'me' without a world that burdens it is like trying to run away from our own shadow;

no matter how hard we run, the effort is bound to fail as the one form generates the other.

The aim of all these teachings on Atammayatā is to show us that the dualities of subject and object ('me and the world'), do not have to be brought into being at all. And when the heart is restrained from 'going out,' and awakens to its fundamental nature, a bright and joyful peace is what remains. This is the peace of Nibbāna.

These reflections upon Atammayatā bring us to the end of our exploration of the conditioned realm and with this we begin the next phase of the enquiry.

7

ATTENDING TO THE DEATHLESS

THIS CHAPTER, AND THOSE SUBSEQUENT TO IT in this section of the book, will describe the practice of turning toward the Unconditioned, the Deathless, the need to attend to it, and some of the ways that the Buddha talked about its nature.

> 7.1) Then Ven. Anuruddha went to where Ven. Sāriputta was staying and, on arrival, greeted him courteously. After an exchange of friendly greetings, he sat down to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Sāriputta: "By means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human, I see the thousand-fold cosmos. My energy is aroused and unsluggish. My mindfulness is established and unshaken. My body is calm and unaroused. My mind is concentrated into singleness. And yet my mind is not released from the outflows through lack of clinging."
>
> "My friend, when the thought occurs to you, 'By means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human, I see the thousand-fold cosmos,' that is related to your conceit. When the thought occurs to you, 'My energy is aroused and unsluggish. My mindfulness is established and unshaken. My body is calm and unperturbed. My mind is concentrated into singleness,' that is related to your restlessness. When the thought occurs to you, 'And yet my mind is not released from the outflows through lack of clinging,' that is related to your anxiety. It would be well if – abandoning these three qualities, not attending to these three qualities – you directed your mind to the Deathless element."
>
> So after that, Ven. Anuruddha – abandoning those three qualities, not attending to those three qualities – directed his mind to the Deathless element. Dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent and resolute, he in no long time reached and remained in the

> supreme goal of the holy life for which people rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realizing it for himself in the here and now. He knew: Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is no more coming into any state of being. And thus Ven. Anuruddha became another one of the arahants.
> ~ A 3.128

There are many such delightful and pithy vignettes in the Pali Canon – the simplicity and directness of the exchange between two companions in the holy life; the apparently affectionate and ironic demolition of the pride and anxiety in relation to achievements that the average spiritual aspirant might be pleased even to approach; the direct and practical pointing out of the path – all these elements are present in this brief account.

Probably most significant to the theme of this investigation is the process of turning away from even the most exalted domains of the conditioned realm. Ven. Sāriputta's unerring acuity of vision has discerned that, even though his friend's meditation has been bringing some spectacular results (Ven. Anuruddha was later to be named by the Buddha as the one most accomplished in seeing into other realms of existence), he has been missing the crucial and liberating element: the presence of the Unconditioned. To enable his friend's attention to make this radical shift of view, Ven. Sāriputta employs the tactic of naming the ways in which his mind is misapprehending, and identifying with these experiences. He also, it seems, is defining the three problems that Ven. Anuruddha is beset with in terms of the final three of the Ten Fetters (saṃyojanā): the fetters of conceit (asmimāna), restlessness (uddhacca) and ignorance (avijjā).

This last of the three might be debatable as a parallel for 'anxiety' (the Pali word in the text here is kukkuccasmiṃ), however, as Ven. Anuruddha is clearly close to the final realization of arahantship, these three particular elements would necessarily need to be seen and overcome for his heart's liberation to occur. His brother in the holy life is merely pointing out to him that the 'I' that keeps appearing in his thoughts about those two achievements, and the lack of the third achievement, has been obscuring the Deathless element and has actually been the stumbling block obstructing the path.

It is also worthy of note that the wording of the Ven. Sāriputta's advice implies that it is just a change of perspective, a different locus of attention that is needed, not a scrapping of all that has gone before. A simple analogy is the refocusing of the eyes in such a way as to see the computer generated, hidden 3-D

images in a 'magic eye' picture, rather than a meaningless blur. Furthermore, inclining the mind, attending to the Deathless is usually expressed in the phrase, "This is peaceful, this is exquisite..." underscoring that this shift of perspective does not just mean seeing things from a different angle, it refers instead to realizing the presence of a dimension of peace and beauty hitherto unappreciated.

It also needs to be stressed that Ven. Anuruddha was an anagāmi, a 'non-returner,' thus at the penultimate stage of enlightenment, when this exchange with Ven. Sāriputta took place. Many of his spiritual qualities were extremely ripe and without that ripeness, the immense preparation necessary for a full understanding of the nature of reality, the breakthrough to full enlightenment could not have come so swiftly. It takes more than the capacity to see the hidden dimensions of a 'magic eye' picture to fully liberate the heart!

The term 'the Deathless element' (amata-dhātu) was mentioned above, (at §7.1) with the suggestion that it is synonymous with 'the Unconditioned' (asaṅkhata-dhamma). It might be useful, however, to look briefly at the origin of the term – particularly since both 'Deathless' and 'element,' in English at least, can carry a tone of 'thing-ness' with them and thus convey an unintended concrete quality. On this point a contemporary Buddhist scholar, Stephen Collins, is worth quoting. His proposition is that amṛtam (Skt) – 'amata' in Pali – is a classic Vedic reference to:

> 7.2) An essential timelessness (or a timeless essence) both preceding and in some sense underlying the ordered human world of time; this is the immobile hub of the moving wheel of time, the still point (pada) beyond the ceaseless movement of saṃsāra.
> ~ Stephen Collins, 'Selfless Persons,' p 43

The following passage is similar to the first one of this chapter, both in its description of the practice of attending to the Deathless, and in the dialogue from which the discourse takes its provenance.

The Buddha has asked the assembly: "Bhikkhus, do you remember the five lower fetters as taught by me?" The Ven. Mālunkyaputta responds by saying that he does but when he recites the list, apparently correctly, to his astonishment the Buddha responds: "Mālunkyaputta, to whom do you remember my having taught the five lower fetters in this way? Would not the followers of other sects confute you with the simile of the infant?" The Buddha then outlines this simile and shows how "a young tender infant lying prone" could be said to be free of the five lower fetters: personality-view (sakkāyadiṭṭhi); sceptical doubt (vicikicchā);

attachment to rules and conventions (sīlabbataparāmāsa); sensual desire (kāma-rāga); and ill will (vyāpāda). So, rather like Ven. Anuruddha, the wind is taken out of Mālunkyaputta's sails but, in due course, he also gets provided with a much more profound understanding of the Dhamma.

> 7.3) "Here… a bhikkhu enters upon and remains in the first jhāna: experiencing refreshment and pleasure born of with-drawal, accompanied by applied and sustained thought. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with the body, feeling, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness as impermanent, unsatisfactory, a disease, a cancer, a barb, pain-ful, an affliction, alien, as disintegrating, void, as not self.
> "He turns his mind away from those states, and having done so, inclines his mind towards the property of Deathlessness, recog-nising: 'This is peaceful, this is exquisite – the stilling of all mental processes, the relinquishment of all the paraphernalia of becoming, the ending of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna.' Standing there, he reaches the ending of the mental outflows. Or, if not, then – through that very Dhamma-passion, that Dhamma-delight (dhammarāgena dhammanandiyā), and from the total ending of the first five of the fetters – he is due to be reborn in the Pure Abodes, there to attain final Nibbāna, never again to return from that world."
> ~ M 64.9-16, A 9.36

The same wording is repeated with reference to the other three rūpa-jhānas and similarly for the first three arūpa-jhānas; the two uppermost realms of concentration, the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and the 'cessation of perception and feeling,' are too refined a basis to allow any investi-gative reflection of this type.

Here is a passage from the Itivuttaka on a similar theme:

> 7.4) This was said by the Blessed One…
> "Bhikkhus, there are these three elements – what three?
> The form element, the formless element and the
> element of cessation. These are the three.
> "By fully understanding form,
> and not getting stuck in formless states,

> they are released into cessation,
> with Death left in their wake.
> "Having touched with his own person
> the Deathless realm that can't be owned,
> all grasping relinquished,
> the taints all gone,
> the Awakened One displays
> the sorrowless state that's free from stain."
> ~ Iti 51

In the purity of unhindered awareness, in turning away from concern with the conditioned, the wholly peaceful and clear reality is revealed.

> 7.5) "Once, friend, when I was staying in Sāketa at the Game Refuge in the Black Forest, the nun Jaṭilā Bhāgikā went to where I was staying, and on arrival – having bowed to me – she stood to one side. As soon as she had stood to one side, she said to me: 'The concentration whereby – neither pressed down nor forced back, nor with mental formations kept blocked or suppressed – still as a result of release, contented as a result of stillness, and as a result of contentment one is not agitated: This concentration is said by the Blessed One to be the fruit of what?'
> "I said to her: 'This concentration is said by the Blessed One to be the fruit of awakening.'"
> ~ A 9.37

Although this realization is, in its own way, remarkably simple, it cannot be overemphasized that (as with Ven. Anuruddha's enlightenment) it is necessarily based on a massive foundation of spiritual maturity – the nun who was speaking to Ven. Ānanda was an arahant. The purity and simplicity of these accounts and these teachings can thus belie their depth and the sheer spiritual strength required to actualize them.

The final issue to address in this chapter is the usage and meaning of the phrase, 'merging with the Deathless,' (amatogadhā). There are numerous occasions where the Buddha uses such expressions as:

> 7.6) "These five faculties [faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom] when maintained in being and developed,

> merge in the Deathless, reach to the Deathless and end in the Deathless."
> ~ S 48.57, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli trans., (cf S 48.44)

Or, as an alternative translation:

> 7.7) "These five faculties, when developed and cultivated, have the Deathless as their ground, the Deathless as their destination, the Deathless as their final goal."
> ~ ibid, Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.

> 7.8) "Rooted in interest are all things;
> born of attention are all things;
> arising from contact are all things;
> converging on feelings are all things;
> headed by concentration are all things;
> dominated by mindfulness are all things;
> surmounted by wisdom are all things;
> yeilding deliverance as their essence are all things;
> merging in the Deathless are all things;
> terminating in Nibbāna are all things."
> ~ A 10.58

> 7.9) "Mindfulness of death, monks, if cultivated and frequently practised, brings great fruit, great benefit; it merges in the Deathless, ends in the Deathless."
> ~ A 8.73 (Similar passages are found at A 8.74, A 9.14 and numerous other places.)

So what might be meant by "merging in the Deathless," or "the Deathless as their ground, destination and final goal"?

In the Vedas the image of the self (ātman) reuniting with the Godhead (brahman) is a common characterization of the spiritual path. Many other expressions of spiritual knowledge also employ the language of 'becoming one with everything,' 'interrelatedness,' 'merging with the Universe,' 'the Dewdrop slips into the shining Sea,' etc. and such language plainly endeavours to represent a gravitation of the heart towards Truth, an aspiration that is intuitive to the human condition. Thus it would be easy to read the statements on 'merging' as a similar kind of

spiritual ‘return’ or ‘union.’ However, the Buddha expended considerable effort to counteract this model and very carefully pointed out, in numerous teachings, that all these types of expression are subtly rooted in wrong view, for example:

> 7.10) “Having directly known that which is not commensurate with the allness of All, I did not claim to be All, I did not claim to be in All, I did not claim to be apart from All, I did not claim All to be ‘mine,’ I did not affirm All.”
> ~ M 49.23

> 7.11) “They perceive All as All. Having perceived All as All, they conceive [themselves as] All, they conceive [themselves] in All, they conceive [themselves] apart (or coming) from All, they conceive All to be ‘theirs,’ they delight in All. Why is that? Because they have not fully understood it, I say.”
> ~ M 1.25

This latter passage expresses some of the kinds of view that he criticized as ‘eternalist’ and thus one of the extremes to be avoided. The Buddha insistently spoke of the Middle Way as the path to freedom and peace, therefore it is most helpful to keep returning to that principle as the primal guide – just as in a tight-rope walk, there is both the constant danger of tilting too far to the left or the right, and the need for a relaxed yet alert attention to minor fluctuations of balance.

It is a pronounced human tendency to lean toward either eternalism or nihilism, pushing ahead or holding back; the Buddha’s teaching is unsurpassed in both analysing and providing genuine means for counteracting such tendencies.

Perhaps the clearest expression of this problem, and its antidote, that has come down to us in the Suttas is found at Iti 49 (§5.30); it is also touched on at Ud 3.10 (§§1.7, 4.1, 5.19) and most significantly at S 12.15 (§5.32).

When one reflects on the language the Buddha uses to express this principle of merging with the Deathless and meshes it with his statements about the All, one can see that the image of the relationship of habitual sense perceptions (the All) to the Deathless is more that of coming out of a dream and merging with waking reality (recognizing the coil of rope after fearing the snake in the grass), rather than a river merging with a sea of identical substance.

If, instead, we understand the language in this way: “All dreams merge with waking reality, have waking reality as their ground, reach to the waking state and have that as their end” – the imagery still holds but we are respecting the

utterly transcendent nature of the Deathless, just as the waking state utterly transcends the world of dream.

Now, it could also be contended that these passages, as quoted here, are not perfect renderings – for example, that a better translation of 'amatogadhā' would be "gains a footing in the Deathless" – and that this discussion of 'merging' is thus all beside the point. However, the issue at hand is that of misunderstanding and the human habit of misreading things according to one's biases, often either eternalist or annihilationist.

The fact is that the English phrases 'merging with' or 'plunging into' etc. have been frequently used by a variety of translators, and have equally regularly been used to back up biased views of various kinds. Thus it remains useful to contemplate these teachings as they have been transmitted to us, measuring them against known truths, and to find the Middle Way through our own reflection.

8

UNSUPPORTED AND UNSUPPORTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

One of the ways in which the Buddha characterized the quality of awareness was to present it as a form of consciousness (viññāṇa). This represents a unique usage of the term – customarily 'viññāṇa' only refers to the conditioned activity of the six senses – however, we also find that the Buddha gives us some adjectives with which to describe it, when the term is used in this unique way: 'viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ' – 'consciousness that is signless, boundless, all-luminous,' is one translation of this expression.

It almost goes without saying that there is controversy as to the precise meaning of this enigmatic phrase (it appears in only a couple of places in the Canon: M 49.25 & D 11.85). However, the constellation of meanings of the individual words is small enough to give us a reasonably clear idea of what the Buddha was pointing at.

Firstly, we must assume that he is using 'viññāṇa' in a broader way than it usually is meant. The Buddha avoided the nit-picking pedantry of many philosophers contemporary with him and opted for a more broad-brush, colloquial style, geared to particular listeners in a language which they could understand (see after §1.11). Thus 'viññāṇa' here can be asssumed to mean 'knowing' but not the partial, fragmented, discriminative (vi-) knowing (-ñāṇa) which the word usually implies. Instead it must mean a knowing of a primordial, transcendent nature, otherwise the passage which contains it would be self-contradictory.

Secondly, 'anidassanaṃ' is a fairly straightforward word which means (a-) 'not, non-, without' (-nidassanaṃ) 'indicative, visible, manifestative,' i.e. invisible, empty, featureless, unmanifest; 'anantaṃ' is also a straightforward term, meaning 'infinite' or 'limitless.' The final phrase, 'sabbato pabhaṃ' is a little trickier. Here is Bhikkhu Bodhi's comment from note 513 to the Majjhima Nikāya:

> 8.1) "MA [the ancient Commentary] offers three explanations of the phrase sabbato pabhaṃ: (1) completely possessed of

> splendour (pabhā); (2) possessing being (pabhūtaṃ) everywhere; and (3) a ford (pabhaṃ) accessible from all sides, i.e., through any of the thirty-eight meditation objects. Only the first of these seems to have any linguistic legitimacy."

It is perhaps also significant that both of the instances where this phrase is used by the Buddha are in passages involving the demonstration of his superiority over the brahmā gods. It is thus conceivable that the phraseology derives from some spiritual or mythological principle dear to the brahmins, and which the Buddha is employing to expand the familiar meaning, or to turn it around. As we saw in Ch 2, this was a common source of the Buddha's choice of words and metaphorical images.

The longer of the two versions of this phrase comes at the end of a colourful and lengthy teaching tale recounted by the Buddha in the Kevaddha Sutta (D 11). He tells of a monk in the mind of whom the question arises: "I wonder where it is that the four great elements – Earth, Water, Fire and Wind – cease without remainder?" Being a skilled meditator, the bhikkhu in question enters a state of absorption and "the path to the gods becomes open to him." He begins by putting his question to the first gods he meets, the retinue of the Four Heavenly Kings, the guardians of the world; they demur, saying that they do not know the answer, but that the Four Kings themselves probably do: he should ask them. He does, they do not and the search continues.

Onward and upward through successive heavens he travels, continually being met with the same reply: "We do not know but you should try asking..." and is referred to the next higher level of the celestial heirarchy. Patiently enduring the protracted process of following this cosmic chain of command, he finally arrives in the presence of the retinue of Mahā-Brahmā, he puts the question to them; once again they fail to produce an answer but they assure him that The Great Brahmā Himself, should He deign to manifest, is certain to provide him with the resolution he seeks. Sure enough, before too long, He appears and at this point we are treated to a taste of the wry wit of the Buddha:

> 8.2) "And that monk went up to him and said: 'Friend, where do the four great elements – earth, water, fire, air – cease without remainder?' to which the Great Brahmā replied: 'Monk, I am Brahmā, Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All Seeing, All Powerful, the Lord, the Maker and Creator, the Ruler, Appointer and Orderer, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.'

"A second time the monk said: 'Friend, I did not ask if you are Brahmā, Great Brahmā ... I asked you where the four great elements cease without remainder.' And a second time the Great Brahmā replied as before.

"And a third time the monk said: 'Friend, I did not ask you that, I asked where the four great elements – earth, water, fire, air – cease without remainder.' Then, Kevaddha, the Great Brahmā took that monk by the arm, led him aside and said: 'Monk, these devas believe there is nothing Brahmā does not see, there is nothing he does not know, there is nothing he is unaware of. That is why I did not speak in front of them. But, monk, I don't know where the four great elements cease without remainder. And therefore, monk, you have acted wrongly, you have acted incorrectly by going beyond the Blessed Lord and going in search of an answer to this question elsewhere. Now, monk, you just go to the Blessed Lord and put this question to him, and whatever answer he gives, accept it.'

"So that monk, as swiftly as a strong man might flex or unflex his arm, vanished from the brahmā world and appeared in my presence. He prostrated himself before me, then sat down to one side and said: 'Lord, where do the four great elements – the earth element, the water element, the fire element and the air element – cease without remainder?'

"I replied: '... But, monk, you should not ask your question in this way: 'Where do the four great elements – the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the air element – cease without remainder?' Instead, this is how the question should have been put:

'Where do earth, water, fire and air no footing find?
Where are long and short, small and great, fair and foul –
Where are "name and form" wholly destroyed?'

"And the answer is:

"Where consciousness is signless, boundless, all-luminous,
That's where earth, water, fire and air find no footing,
There both long and short, small and great, fair and foul –
There 'name and form' are wholly destroyed.
With the cessation of consciousness this is all destroyed."

> Thus the Lord spoke, and the householder Kevaddha, delighted, rejoiced at his words.
> ~ D 11.81-5, (Maurice Walshe trans.)

An alternative translation renders the final verses thus:

> 8.3) 'Where do earth and water, fire and wind, long and short, fine and coarse,
> Pleasant and unpleasant, no footing find?
> Where is it that name and form
> Are held in check with no trace left?'
>
> 'Consciousness which is non-manifestative, endless, lustrous on all sides,
> Here it is that earth and water, fire and wind, no footing find.
> Here again are long and short, subtle and gross, pleasant and unpleasant
> Name and form, all cut off without exceptions.
>
> When consciousness comes to cease, these are held in check herein.'
> ~ ibid, (Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda trans.)

As mentioned earlier, there has been considerable debate over the centuries as to the real and precise meaning of these verses. Rather than to try to put forth the definitive meaning that will settle the question forever, perhaps it's wiser just to consider the elements of the teaching that are presented here and let one's own understanding arise from that contemplation.

Having said that, there are two semantic points which are important to understand, in order to appreciate these verses better. Firstly 'name' and 'form': these are nāma-rūpa in the Pali – they are two very common terms and, along with the way they have been translated here, they were used by the Buddha equally to refer to mentality and materiality respectively.

There is no one correct version of what nāma-rūpa means and often the most accurate interpretation involves the broad spread of meanings – therefore one will find numerous translations that use mind-and-body, materiality-mentality, name-and-form: all are correct in their own way.

Usefully, and especially in the context of the discussion on the teaching to

Bāhiya (see §3.6), in Prof. Rhys Davids' translation of the Dīgha Nikāya, he quotes Neumann's rendering of nāma and rūpa as 'subject and object.' This is a helpful perspective since, for some, the 'cessation of consciousness' or 'the destruction of mind and body' might seem like depressing or nihilistic phrases, whereas 'the dissolution of subject/object dualities' and the freedom ensuing from that, sounds considerably more appealing. In this light it's also worthy of note that the tangible qualities of the mind where no footing can be found for everyday dualisms include 'radiance' and 'limitlessness' – hardly uninviting qualities either.

The second point is the use of the word 'nirodha.' In the above-quoted sutta the verb variously translated as 'destroyed,' 'cut off' and 'held in check' is uparujjhati, which is virtually identical in meaning to nirujjhati, the verb derived from 'nirodha.' Customarily it is translated as 'cessation' as in dukkha-nirodha, 'the cessation of suffering.' In the above translations it, and its derivations, have been variously rendered 'destroyed,' 'come to cease' but also 'held in check.' The Pali root of the word is -rud, which not only implies to end, stop or quench, but also to hold in check, as an impulsive and restless horse is reined in. Thus there is a breadth of meaning in these key terms, of the last two lines of the verses which end both §§8.2 & 8.3, that is easy to miss in the English. Perhaps the best way of paraphrasing them is to say that when the dualistic, discriminative process is checked then the 'thing-ness,' the solid externality of the world and the 'me-ness' of the mind are seen as essentially insubstantial. There is no footing for the apparent independent existence of mental or material objects or an independent subject.

Here are some words from an eminent Buddhist scholar of Thailand to help further clarify the meaning of this term.

> 8.4) A PROBLEM WITH THE WORD 'NIRODHA'
> The word nirodha has been translated as 'cessation' for so long that it has become standard practice, and any deviation from it leads to queries. Even in this book I have opted for this standard translation for the sake of convenience and to avoid confusing it for other Pali terms (apart from lack of a better word). In fact, however, this rendering of the word nirodha as 'ceased' can in many instances be a mis-rendering of the text.
> Generally speaking, the word 'cease' means to do away with something which has already arisen, or the stopping of something which has already begun. However, nirodha in the teaching of Dependent Origination (as also in dukkhanirodha,

the third of the Noble Truths) means the non-arising, or non-existence, of something because the cause of its arising is done away with. For example, the phrase "when avijjā is nirodha, saṅkhārā are also nirodha," which is usually taken to mean, "with the cessation of ignorance, volitional impulses cease," in fact means that "when there is no ignorance, or no arising of ignorance, or when there is no longer any problem with ignorance, there are no volitional impulses, volitional impulses do not arise, or there is no longer any problem from volitional impulses." It does not mean that ignorance already arisen must be done away with before the volitional impulses which have already arisen will also be done away with.

Where nirodha should be rendered as cessation is when it is used in reference to the natural way of things, or the nature of compounded things. In this sense it is a synonym for the words 'bhaṅga,' breaking up, anicca (transient), khaya (cessation) or vaya (decay). For example, in the Pali it is given: imaṃ kho bhikkhave tisso vedanā aniccā saṅkhatā paṭiccasamuppannā khayadhammā vayadhammā virāgadhammā nirodhadhammā – "Monks, these three kinds of feeling are naturally impermanent, compounded, dependently arisen, transient, subject to decay, dissolution, fading and cessation." (All of the factors occurring in the Dependent Origination cycle have the same nature.) In this instance, the meaning is "all conditioned things (saṅkhārā), having arisen, must inevitably decay and fade according to supporting factors." There is no need to try to stop them, they cease of themselves. Here the intention is to describe a natural condition which, in terms of practice, simply means "that which arises can be done away with."

As for nirodha in the third Noble Truth (or the Dependent Origination cycle in cessation mode), although it also describes a natural process, its emphasis is on practical considerations. It is translated in two ways in the Visuddhimagga. One way traces the etymology to 'ni' (without) + 'rodha' (prison, confine, obstacle, wall, impediment), thus rendering the meaning as 'without impediment,' 'free of confinement.' This is explained as 'free of impediments, that is, the confinement of saṃsāra.' Another definition traces the origin to 'anuppāda,' meaning 'not arising,'

> and goes on to say 'nirodha here does not mean bhaṅga, breaking up and dissolution.'
> Therefore, translating nirodha as 'cessation,' although not entirely wrong, is nevertheless not entirely accurate. On the other hand, there is no other word which comes so close to the essential meaning as 'cessation.' However, we should understand what is meant by the term. In this context, the Dependent Origination cycle in its cessation mode might be better rendered as "being free of ignorance, there is freedom from volitional impulses..." or "when ignorance is gone, volitional impulses are gone..." or "when ignorance ceases to give fruit, volitional impulses cease to give fruit..." or "when ignorance is no longer a problem, volitional impulses are no longer a problem."
> Even in the forward mode there are some problems with definitions. The meanings of many of the Pali terms are too broad to be translated into any single English word. For instance, 'avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā...' also means "When ignorance is like this, volitional impulses are like this; volitional impulses being this way, consciousness is like this; consciousness being this way, body and mind are like this..."
> ~ Ven. P.A. Payutto, 'Dependent Origination,' pp 106-8

Although spiritual parallels can sometimes be deceptive, it is tempting, at this point, to make a comparison between two different spiritual traditions. This is due both to the significance and usefulness of the phrase "viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ," as a tool for Dhamma practice, as well as the potency and popularity of the Tibetan Buddhist practice of dzogchen ('natural great perfection') in the West these days.

In listening to dzogchen teachings it is clear that the aim of the practice is to establish the mind in 'innate, self-arising rigpa'; this latter word – for which the Skt. is vidyā and the Pali vijjā (transcendent knowing) – is variously translated as 'non-dual awareness,' 'innate wisdom,' 'pure presence,' 'primordial being.' Again and again its principal qualities are ennumerated: empty of essence, cognizant in nature, unconfined in capacity. Or, using a different translation of these terms: emptiness, knowing, and lucidity or clarity. Again, the translations into English vary but, on consideration, the resemblance to the adjectives describing the mind "where long and short etc. can find no footing" is striking. To spell it out: viññāṇaṃ = cognizant in nature; anidassanaṃ = empty; anantaṃ = unconfined in

capacity; sabbato pabham = lucid in quality. Whether or not this is a valid alignment of principles is for the individual to discover. However, as both of these teachings ostensibly point to the nature of the heart liberated from ignorance, it is illuminating that these two traditions, now so widely separated geographically, should hold such similar teachings as key distillations of their wisdom.

As a final comment on this passage, Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda explains it thus:

> 8.5) The last line of the verse stresses the fact that the four great elements do not find a footing – and that 'Name-and-Form' (comprehending them) can be cut off completely – in that 'anidassana viññāṇa' (the 'non manifestative consciousness') of the Arahant, by the cessation of his normal consciousness which rests on the data of sense experience. This is a corrective to that monk's notion that the four elements can cease altogether somewhere – a notion which has its roots in the popular conception of self-existing material elements. The Buddha's reformulation of the original question and this concluding line are meant to combat this wrong notion.
> ~ Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, 'Concept and Reality,' p 66

The words of these teachings are echoed in another episode recounted in the Pali scriptures. In this passage the Buddha is approached by a deva called Rohitassa. It seems that in former times Rohitassa had been an accomplished yogi, a 'sky-walker' who could step from the eastern to the western sea of India. He said to the Buddha:

> 8.6) "In me, Lord, there arose the wish – 'I will get to the end of the world by walking.' I walked thus for a hundred years without sleeping, and pausing only to eat and drink and answer the calls of nature. Even though I exerted myself thus for a hundred years, I did not reach the end of the world and eventually I died on the journey."
> To this the Buddha replied: "It is true that one cannot reach the end of the world by walking but, unless one reaches the end of the world one will not reach the end of dukkha. It is in this fathom-long body, with its perceptions and ideas, that this world, its origin, its cessation and the way leading to its cessation are to be found:

> "One who knows the world goes to the world's end,
> One who lives the holy life.
> With heart serene, they understand the world's end
> And do not hanker for this world or another."
> ~ S 2.26, A 4.45

Both Rohitassa and the errant monk in the tale the Buddha told to Kevaddha have been looking in the wrong way and in the wrong place – looking for finality in saṃsāra, which is endlessness itself; as Ajahn Chah would put it:

> 8.7) "If you are looking for security in that which is inherently insecure, if you are looking for satisfaction in that which is incapable of satisfying, you are bound to suffer."
> ~ Ajahn Chah, (anecdotal)

In his manner of speaking the Buddha shifts the perspective to the other side of the border, as it were, and speaks from the point of view of the Unconditioned mind. The problem is not in the nature of the sense world, the problem is the habit of taking it to be the Ultimate Reality.

Here are some related passages from other places in the Pali Canon and from some of the Thai forest meditation masters.

> 8.8) Where water, earth, fire and wind have no footing,
> there the stars do not shine,
> the sun is not visible,
> the moon does not appear,
> darkness is not found.
>
> And when a sage, a worthy one, through wisdom
> has known this for themselves,
> then from form and name,
> from pleasure and pain,
> they are freed.
> ~ Ud 1.10

> 8.9) "To one endowed in what manner does form cease to exist?"
> "One who is neither of normal perception nor of abnormal perception, one who is neither non-percipient nor who has put

an end to perception, it is to one who is thus constituted that form ceases to pertain, for reckonings characterized by conceptual proliferation have perceptions as their source."
~ SN 873-4

8.10) Luang Por Chah continued on his wanderings looking for peaceful places to practice until one day he reached Bahn Kohk Yaou where he came across a deserted monastery about half a kilometre from the edge of the hamlet. His mind felt light and tranquil. It was as if there was a kind of gathering of forces. "One night there was a festival on in the village. Some time after eleven o'clock, while I was walking jongkrom, I began to feel rather strange. In fact this feeling – an unusual kind of calmness and ease – had first appeared during the day. When I became weary from walking I went into the small grass-roofed hut to sit and was taken by surprise. Suddenly my mind desired tranquillity so intensely that I could hardly cross my legs quickly enough. It just happened by itself. Almost immediately the mind did indeed become peaceful. It felt firm and stable. It wasn't that I couldn't hear the sounds of merrymaking in the village; I could still hear them, but if I wished to, I could not hear them. It was strange. When I paid no attention to the sounds there was silence. If I wanted to hear them I could and felt no irritation. Within my mind it was as if there were two objects standing there together but with no connection between them. I saw the mind and its sense object established in different areas like a kettle and a spittoon placed by a monk's seat. I realized that if concentration is still weak you hear sounds but when the mind is empty then it's silent. If a sound arises, and you look at the awareness of it, you see that the awareness is separate from the sound. I reflected: 'Well how else could it be? That's just the way it is. They're unconnected.' I kept considering this point until I realized, 'Ah, this is important: when continuity (santati) between things is broken then there is peace (santi).' Formerly there had been santati and now from it had emerged santi. I continued with my meditation. My mind was completely indifferent to all external phenomena."
~ 'Uppalamani,' an unpublished biography of Ajahn Chah, by Phra Ong Nueng

Here are a couple of passages from the scriptures that give a little more background to the mental qualities that Ajahn Chah is describing.

> 8.11) There is the case, Sandha, where for a superior person the perception of earth with regard to earth has ceased to exist; the perception of water with regard to water ... the perception of fire with regard to fire... the perception of air with regard to air ... the perception of the sphere of the infinitude of space with regard to the sphere of the infinitude of space ... the perception of the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness with regard to the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness ... the perception of the sphere of nothingness with regard to the sphere of nothingness ... the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception with regard to the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception ... the perception of this world with regard to this world ... the next world with regard to the next world ... and whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect: the perception with regard even to that has ceased to exist.
> Meditating in this way, the superior person meditates dependent neither on earth, water, fire, wind, the sphere of the infinitude of space, the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, this world, the next world, nor on whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after or pondered by the intellect – and yet they do meditate. And to this superior person, meditating in this way, the gods, together with Indra, the brahmās and their chief queens, pay homage even from afar:
> "Homage to you, O superior one!
> "Homage to you, O superlative one, of whom we have no direct knowledge even of what it is you meditate dependent upon!"
> ~ A 11.9

> 8.12) Now, the Ven. Ānanda went to see the Blessed One, and on coming to him saluted him and sat down at one side. So seated he said this to the Blessed One:
> "Venerable sir, may it be that a bhikkhu's attainment of concentration is of such a sort that in earth he does not perceive earth,

> in water he does not perceive water, in fire he does not perceive fire, in air he does not perceive air, in the sphere of infinite space he does not perceive it, in the sphere of infinite consciousness he does not perceive it, in the sphere of nothingness he does not perceive it, in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception he does not perceive it; that in this world he does not perceive this world, in the world beyond he does not perceive the world beyond – and yet at the same time he does perceive?"
> "It may be so, Ānanda. A bhikkhu's winning of concentration may be of such sort ... and yet at the same time he does perceive."
> "But, venerable sir, in what way may a bhikkhu's winning of concentration be of such a sort that still he does perceive?"
> "Herein, Ānanda, a bhikkhu has this perception: This is the real, this is the best, namely, the stilling of all formations, the abandonment of the substratum of existence, the ending of craving, the fading of desire, cessation, Nibbāna. In such a way, Ānanda, a bhikkhu's attainment of concentration may be of such a sort that in earth... and yet at the same time he does perceive."
> ~ A 10.6

The experience of meditating at night in the forests of Thailand, whilst the sounds of raucous activity from the nearby villages fill the air, is a very common one. Ajahn Chah often referred to another, similar insight which arose on one such occasion. As in the previous story he was endeavouring to practice meditation but, at this earlier time, he was becoming irritated by the noise:

> 8.13) "Why do they waste their time doing unskilful things and make disturbance for everybody else into the bargain? Don't they know there's a monk out here in the woods trying to meditate and practice the Buddha's path? I go into the village every day for alms, they know I'm here, they should know better than to be so insensitive – they're making a lot of bad karma..." etc. etc.
> Suddenly, amidst the flow of righteous indignation, he realized: "The sound is just sound, it's only doing its duty as sound, it has no intention to annoy me. Why should I go out and annoy it? If I leave it alone what harm can it do me?" Upon this realization his

> mind became very peaceful, even though the sounds of the village festival were still there.
> Ajahn Chah, (anecdotal)

In a similar vein, here is a passage from the teachings of Luang Pu Dun.

> 8.14) Luang Pu lived at his monastery in Surin for fifty years without spending a Rains Retreat elsewhere. It is in the middle of the town and because of that it is quite noisy. Especially during occasions like the Elephant Festival or New Year, it can be a week or two of constant impingement. For any of the monks and novices who are not firm in their practice it can be quite disrupting.
> Whenever anyone would complain, Luang Pu would instruct: "Why are you bothering to take interest in such things? It's ordinary for light to be bright. It's ordinary for sound to make noise. That's its duty. If we don't take an interest in it, it stops right there. Look after yourself so that you are not an enemy to the circumstances you are in, because the circumstances are just that way – that's all. Just see things with true wisdom and that's enough."
> ~ Luang Pu Dun, 'Atulo,' collected teachings compiled by Phra Bodhinandamuni

Such detachment, providing 'no footing' for the flow of experience, is not confined to sense perceptions alone, very significantly it also applies to thoughts, moods and emotions. The Buddha outlines this clearly in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta:

> 8.15) And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind as mind? Here a bhikkhu understands mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust, and mind unaffected by lust as mind unaffected by lust. He understands mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate, and mind unaffected by hate as mind unaffected by hate. He understands mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion. He understands contracted mind as contracted mind, and distracted mind as distracted mind. He understands exalted mind as exalted mind,

> and unexalted mind as unexalted mind. He understands surpassed mind as surpassed mind, and unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed mind. He understands concentrated mind as concentrated mind, and unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind. He understands liberated mind as liberated mind, and unliberated mind as unliberated mind.
> In this way he abides contemplating mind as mind internally, or he abides contemplating mind as mind externally, or he abides contemplating mind as mind both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating mind in its arising factors, or he abides contemplating mind in its vanishing factors, or he abides contemplating mind in both its arising and vanishing factors. Or else mindfulness that 'there is mind' is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind as mind.
> ~ M 10.34-35, D 22.12

This principle is well-demonstrated by the following accounts from the teachings, again, of both Ajahn Chah and Luang Pu Dun.

> 8.16) Almost every day, and most of every day, Ajahn Chah would sit on a small wicker bench beneath the shade of his hut and receive a constant stream of visitors. He was entering his latter years and by now was widely known throughout Thailand, and much of the Western world, as a spiritual teacher who was straightforward and earthy, profound, practical and clear. His committed disciples, laypeople as well as monastics, numbered in their thousands and he was recognized as embodying the highest degrees of wisdom and purity of heart.
> One day, amongst the several clusters of folk gathered around to listen to the teachings there sat a man – a middle-aged Thai from another province who had heard of Ajahn Chah's reputation yet had never visited him before. He had been impressed by the serenity of Wat Nong Pah Pong (Ajahn Chah's monastery) but more so by the good-humoured loving-kindness and mountain-like ease of the man to whom he was listening. As he sat there and took it all in, it seemed to him that indeed all that he had

heard about Ajahn Chah was true: here was a man at peace. He had unlocked the secrets of the heart; and though he lived the austere life of a forest-dwelling monk he seemed to be the happiest man in the world.

After a while a certain curiosity was awakened in the visitor – by profession he was a palmist, and something of a mor doo, a blend of astrologer, shaman and clairvoyant not uncommon in Thailand. He edged closer to the master's seat, trying to catch a surreptitious glimpse at the lines on his palms as Ajahn Chah moved his hands, gesticulating as he often did in the illustration of some point of Dhamma, or acting out a metaphor he was using – perhaps the ears of an elephant, the dripping of a water-spout or (and this was ideal) how saṃsāra and Nibbāna are like the front and back of the hand: they happen in the same place and are known by the same awareness.

Catching the desired shot a couple of times, our friend's inquisitiveness bore unexpected fruit. Knowing that Ajahn Chah was a major critic of superstition, protective amulets and other paraphernalia that coagulates around religious traditions, he had been chary of revealing his livelihood, let alone asking outright if he might read the Ajahn's palms. But something had caught his eye that piqued his interest beyond his capacity for self-containment.

"Luang Por, forgive me for being so rude, and pardon me if it's improper to ask, but I'm a palmist and it would make me very happy to be able to have a look at your hands. Would that be possible?"

Eyeing him with a friendly but penetrating glance, Ajahn Chah could see that the man was sincere and honest, with no ulterior motive. Giving him the gruff, all-purpose affirmative grunt which is the Lao way of saying "OK" and also tossing in a couple of amicably derogatory comments such as: "Don't tell me, I'm going to win the lottery – right?" he held his hands out in front of him, palms upward, side by side.

The man shuffled forward, pulled a well-worn pair of spectacles out of his pocket, placed them on his nose and peered forwards. Saying: "Please excuse me," once again, he took hold of the hands. He looked from one to the other, back and forth, tracing

> the lines with his fingertip. Shaking his his head in wonderment he looked up and said: "Luang Por, this is amazing – look at this line here..." And glancing up again, somewhat sheepishly – "You have a LOT of anger!"
> "Yes," replied Ajahn Chah, his face illumined by a foot-wide grin, "that's true; but I don't use it."
> ~ Ajahn Chah, (ancecdotal)

> 8.17) In 1979 Luang Pu Dun was visiting Wat Kau Soo Kim. There was a senior Chao Khun (the head administrative monk for the Southern Region of Thailand) who had come to the monastery to train in meditation in his old age. He was only one year younger than Luang Pu.
> The old monk took the opportunity to discuss Dhamma with Luang Pu for a very long period of time, having confessed to Luang Pu that he had spent almost all his life as a monk in study and administrative work and still had many doubts.
> At the end of their meeting he asked Luang Pu: "Do you still have any anger left?" Luang Pu answered: "Yes, but I don't receive or accept it." ("Mee, daer my ao.")
> ~ Luang Pu Dun, 'Atulo,' collected teachings compiled by Phra Bodhinandamuni

> 8.18) In January 1983 Luang Pu was admitted to hospital, at the age of 94, for the second time in his life. During the time he was at Chulalongkhorn Hospital in Bangkok many people came to pay respects and study Dhamma with him. One day a dedicated practitioner asked him: "What do I do to destroy anger completely?"
> Luang Pu answered: "There isn't anybody who destroys it completely but when it is known fully, it ceases by itself."
> ~ ibid

Now, back to the Pali Canon:

> 8.19) After hearing the declamation of the brahmā god Baka: "Good sir, [if you claim to directly know] that which is not commensurate with the Allness of All, may your claim not turn out to be vain and empty!"

> The Buddha responds to this by saying:
> "Consciousness without feature, without end, luminous all around, does not partake of the solidity of earth, the liquidity of water, the radiance of fire, the windiness of wind... nor of the divinity of the devas... of the brahmās... of the Overlord... or of the Allness of the All."
> ~ M 49.25

As the reader might have noticed, we have returned once more to the words of our opening passage. The Buddha has given this teaching to the brahmā god in order to demonstrate the conditioned and limited nature of the latter's vision. In an interesting reworking of the translation, Bhikkhu Bodhi renders the passage thus:

> 8.20) "The consciousness that makes no showing,
> Nor has to do with finiteness,
> Not claiming being with respect to all:
> that is not commensurate with the earthness of earth... the Allness of All."
> ~ ibid

The following passages from the Pali are the key places where the Buddha speaks of unsupported consciousness per se; they bring together and synthesize much of the material that has already been explored in this chapter. If they are taken as guides for meditation, rather than just as philosophical viewpoints, they largely speak for themselves and are rich sources for reflection.

Their principal strength, the capacity to catalyse insight and liberation, lies in the emphasis they give to the subtle conditioning power of volition and other mental undercurrents, the clarification that it's not necessary to give those tendencies life and solidity – a landing place – and the crucial role that right attitude has in meditation.

> 8.21) "What is intended (ceteti), what is acted upon (pakappeti) and what lies latent (anuseti): this is a support for the establishment of consciousness. There being a support, there is a landing of consciousness. When that consciousness lands and grows, there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. When there is production of renewed becoming in the

> future, there is future birth, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Such is the origin of this entire mass of dukkha.
> "If nothing is intended, if nothing is acted upon but something lies latent: this is a support for the establishment of consciousness... Such is the origin of this entire mass of dukkha.
> "But when nothing is intended, acted upon or lies latent, there is no support for the establishment of consciousness. There being no support, there is no landing of consciousness. When that consciousness does not land and grow, there is no production of renewed becoming in the future. When there is no production of renewed becoming in the future, there is no future birth, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of dukkha."
> ~ S 12.38

The term 'lies latent' is referring to the collection of factors called the seven anusaya or 'latent tendencies' (mentioned previously at §6.9). The standard list runs: attachment, aversion, views, doubts, conceits, attachment to becoming and ignorance.

> 8.22) "One attached is unreleased. One unattached is released. Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to a physical form, supported by form as its object, established on form, watered with delight, it would exhibit growth, increase and development. Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to feeling... perception... formations... it would exhibit growth, increase and development.
> "Were someone to say, 'I will describe a coming, a going, a passing away, an arising, a growth, an increase or development of consciousness apart from form, feeling, perceptions and formations,' that would be impossible.
> "If one abandons passion for the property of form ... feeling ... perception... formations ... consciousness, then owing to the abandonment of passion, the support is cut off, and consciousness is unestablished.
> "Consciousness, thus unestablished, undeveloped, not performing any function, is released. Owing to its staying firm, it is

contented. Owing to its contentment, it is not agitated. Not agitated, such a one realizes complete, perfect Nibbāna within themselves. They know: Birth is ended, the holy life has been fulfilled, what had to be done has been done. There will be no more coming into any state of being."
~ S 22.53

8.23) "Bhikkhus, when the gods with Indra, with Brahmā and with Pajāpati seek a bhikkhu who is thus liberated in mind, they do not find [anything of which they could say]: 'The consciousness of one thus gone is supported by this.' Why is that? One thus gone is untraceable here and now."
~ M 22.36

8.24) "There are these four nutriments for the establishing of beings who have taken birth, or for the support of those in search of a place to be born. Which four? Physical food, gross or refined; contact as the second, consciousness the third, and intention is the fourth. These are the four nutriments for the establishing of beings who have taken birth, or for the support of those in search of a place to be born.

"Where there is passion, delight and craving for the nutriment of physical food, consciousness lands there and grows. Where consciousness lands and grows, mentality-materiality alights. Where mentality-materiality alights, there is the growth of volitional formations. Where there is the growth of volitional formations, there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is the production of renewed becoming in the future, there is birth, aging, and death, together, I tell you, with sorrow, affliction and despair.

"Just as when there is dye, lac, yellow orpiment, indigo or crimson, a dyer or painter would paint the picture of a woman or a man, complete in all its parts, on a well-polished panel or wall, or on a piece of cloth; in the same way, where there is passion, delight and craving for the nutriment of physical food, consciousness lands there and grows... together, I tell you, with sorrow, affliction, and despair.

Similarly with the other three kinds of nutriment.

"Where there is no passion for the nutriment of physical food, where there is no delight, no craving, then consciousness does not land there or grow... Mentality-materiality does not alight.... There is no growth of volitional formations.... There is no production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is no production of renewed becoming in the future, there is no birth, aging and death. That, I tell you, is quite free from sorrow, affliction or despair.

"Just as if there were a roofed house or a roofed hall having windows on the north, the south or the east – when the sun rises and a shaft of light has entered by way of the window, where does it land?"

"On the western wall, venerable sir."

"And if there is no western wall?"

"On the ground, venerable sir."

"And if there is no ground?"

"On the water, venerable sir."

"And if there is no water?"

"It does not land, venerable sir."

"In the same way, when there is no passion for physical nutriment, contact, consciousness or intention, consciousness does not land or grow... That, I tell you, is quite free from sorrow, affliction or despair."

~ S 12.64

8.25) One who is independent
does not tremble;
one who is dependent
clutches, grasps existence
one way or another
and thus is unable to escape saṃsāra.

Consider this dark consequence:
there is danger in dependence.
Therefore
relying on nothing
the mindful bhikkhu travels on
free from clinging.
~ SN 752-3

> 8.26) Rāhula, develop meditation that is like space; for when you develop meditation that is like space, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as space is not established anywhere, so too, Rāhula, develop meditation that is like space for when you develop meditation that is like space, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain.
> ~ M 62.17, (Bhikkhu Bodhi & Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli trans.)

A final discourse that refers to this area sums up the essence of these teachings very succinctly. It also presages some other teachings that we will look at in the upcoming chapters, notably those at §§9.2, 11.8 (where the Buddha speaks of how to evade the King of Death by meditating on emptiness) and 12.21, the Heart Sūtra.

> 8.27) At Sāvatthi. Now on that occasion the Blessed One was instructing, exhorting, inspiring and gladdening the bhikkhus with a Dhamma talk concerning Nibbāna. And those bhikkhus were listening to the Dhamma with eager ears, attending to it as a matter of vital concern, applying their whole minds to it.
> Then it occurred to Māra the Evil One: "This ascetic Gotama is instructing, exhorting, inspiring, and gladdening the bhikkhus… who are applying their whole minds to it. Let me approach the ascetic Gotama in order to confound them."
> Then Māra the Evil One manifested himself in the form of a farmer, carrying a large plough on his shoulder, holding a long goad stick, his hair dishevelled, wearing hempen garments, his feet smeared with mud. He approached the Blessed One and said to him: "Maybe you've seen oxen, ascetic?"
> "What are oxen to you, Evil One?"
> "The eye is mine, ascetic, forms are mine, eye-contact and its base of consciousness are mine. Where can you can go, ascetic, to escape from me? The ear is mine, ascetic, sounds are mine… The nose is mine, ascetic, odours are mine… The tongue is mine, ascetic, tastes are mine… The body is mine, ascetic, tactile objects are mine… The mind is mine, ascetic, mental phenomena are mine, mind-contact and its base of consciousness are mine. Where can you go, ascetic, to escape from me?"
> "The eye is yours, Evil One, forms are yours, eye-contact and its

base of consciousness are yours; but, Evil One, where there is no eye, no forms, no eye-contact and its base of consciousness – there is no place for you there, Evil One. The ear is yours, Evil One, sounds are yours, ear-contact and its base of consciousness are yours; but, Evil One, where there is no ear, no sounds, no ear-contact and its base of consciousness – there is no place for you there, Evil One. The nose is yours, Evil One, odours are yours, nose-contact and its base of consciousness are yours; but, Evil One, where there is no nose, no odours, no nose-contact and its base of consciousness – there is no place for you there, Evil One. The tongue is yours, Evil One, tastes are yours, tongue-contact and its base of consciousness are yours; but, Evil One, where there is no tongue, no tastes, no tongue-contact, and its base of consciousness – there is no place for you there, Evil One. The body is yours, Evil One, tactile objects are yours, body-contact and its base of consciousness are yours; but, Evil One, where there is no body, no tactile objects, no body-contact and its base of consciousness – there is no place for you there, Evil One. The mind is yours, Evil One, mental phenomena are yours, mind-contact and its base of consciousness are yours; but, Evil One, where there is no mind, no mental phenomena, no mind-contact and its base of consciousness – there is no place for you there, Evil One."

[Māra:]
"That of which they say, 'It's mine,'
And those who speak in terms of 'mine' –-
If your mind exists among these,
You won't escape me, ascetic."

[The Blessed One:]
"That which they speak of is not mine,
I'm not one of those who speak [of mine].
You should know thus, O Evil One:
Even my path you will not see."

Then Māra the Evil One, realizing, "The Blessed One knows me,

> the Fortunate One knows me," sad and disappointed, disappeared right there.
> ~ S 4.19 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Lastly, in this chapter, we will look at some related passages from the Northern Buddhist tradition. Here is a section of the Platform Sūtra, otherwise known as the Sūtra of Hui Neng. At this point in the story Hui Neng is a teenage layman, working as a lowly seller of firewood, an only child trying to support his widowed mother.

> 8.28) Once a customer bought firewood and ordered it delivered to his shop. When the delivery had been made and Hui Neng had received the money, he went outside the gate, where he noticed a customer reciting a sūtra. Upon once hearing the words of this sūtra: "One should produce the thought that is nowhere supported," Hui Neng's mind immediately opened to enlightenment.
> ~Master Hsüan Hua, Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra Ch. 1, 'Action and Intention,' (BTTS edn.)

The passage he describes as having heard actually comes from the Vajra (Diamond) Sūtra, one of the most influential wisdom teachings of the Northern School.

> 8.29) "Therefore, Subhūti, the Bodhisattva, Mahāsattva, should produce a pure heart. They should realize and develop that heart which does not dwell in forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects or dharmas. They should realize and develop the heart which dwells nowhere."
> ~ Vajra Sūtra, Ch 10, 'The Adornment of Pure Lands'

This insight into 'the heart which dwells nowhere' or 'the mind which rests on nothing' had a very powerful effect on the young man – he immediately resolved to leave the home life and study the Way with the Fifth Patriarch, Great Master Hung-jen at Tung Ch'an monastery. Fortunately his enthusiasm impressed other townspeople and a man made a large offering of silver to Hui Neng so that his mother would be provided for while the lad went in search of spiritual riches.

Once he had arrived at the monastery, because he was both young and illiterate as well as spiritually precocious, the Patriarch gave him the job of cutting wood and pounding rice in the kitchen. After some time the Fifth Patriarch

announced that he would soon pass on the Patriarchy and, in order to select an appropriate successor, he invited everyone to write a 'gāthā without marks,' a verse expressing their understanding of the essence of the Buddha's wisdom.

The most obvious candidate for the inheritance was the senior instructor and preceptor, Shen Hsiu. The others of the thousand-strong asssembly hesitated to compose verses because they all thought that Shen Hsiu should be the one to receive the mantle. He, however, had major doubts about his own accomplishments and so wrote his verse covertly, in the middle of the night, on a wall of the corridor which was being decorated with some murals. When, to his relieved amazement, the Fifth Patriarch praised it, he revealed himself as the author. The verse ran:

> 8.30) The body is a Bodhi tree,
> The mind like a bright mirror stand;
> time and again brush it clean
> And let no dust alight.
> ~ The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra, Ch 1

As he was illiterate, it was not until he heard another of the residents reciting this verse to himself that Hui Neng found out about what Shen Hsiu had written. Once he had heard it he persuaded an official who was also staying at the monastery, Chang Jih Yung, to transcribe for him a 'markless verse' in response:

> 8.31) Originally Bodhi has no tree,
> The bright mirror has no stand.
> Originally there is not a single thing:
> Where can dust alight?
> ~ ibid

Suffice to say that, on the strength of this, Hui Neng became the Sixth Patriarch. Even though he had to live in hiding with hunters in a remote forest for sixteen years to avoid the jealous machinations of factions who objected to an illiterate barbarian from the south being given the great honour. Eventually he came forth, received ordination and became the greatest of China's Buddhist masters. This sūtra has the honour of being the only one in the Chinese Canon that overtly comes from a time after the Lord Buddha.

9

THE UNCONDITIONED AND NON-LOCALITY

WITH SOME COMPREHENSION OF UNSUPPORTED CONSCIOUSNESS, as well as the quality of Atammayatā, we begin to say good-bye to the world of geography – since, just as there was no 'where' for the sunlight to land in the Buddha's compelling simile (at §8.24), the consciousness of Nibbāna, although real, is best described as being unlocated.

It is interesting to reflect that only what we call physical existence is at all dependent upon three-dimensional space – all the factors of the mental realm (the nāma-khandhas) are 'unlocated'; that is to say, the concepts of place and space do not in any true sense apply there.

Our thoughts and perceptions are so geared to operate in terms of three-dimensional space as the basic reality, and that view of things seems so obvious to common sense, that it is hard for us to conceive of any other possibility. It is only through meditative insight that we can develop the uncommon sense required to see things differently. A couple of everyday examples might serve to lead us into the subject.

Firstly, the word 'cyber-space' is used more and more frequently these days; one talks of "visiting such and such a website" and "my e-mail address" but where are these? Abhayagiri Monastery has a web-site but it does not exist anywhere. It has no geographical location. The words 'visit,' 'homepage,' 'address' and suchlike are the easy jargon of cyberia, and we can be very comfortable using such terms, but the fact is – that just like a thought and, indeed, the mind itself – although they exist they cannot be said to truly be anywhere. Three-dimensional space does not apply in their context.

The second example comes from a (purportedly) true incident. An American tourist, in Oxford, England, approached a tweed-jacketed and bespectacled professorial type and said: "Excuse me, but I wonder if you could tell me where exactly is the University?"

"Madam," the professorial type responded, "'the University' is not, in

reality, anywhere – the University possesses only metaphysical rather than actual existence."

What he meant, of course, was that 'the University' – being comprised of separate, independent colleges and not having a campus – is just a concept agreed upon by a number of humans to have some validity. It might have financial dealings, it might set exams and issue degrees, but physically it does not exist. There are the different colleges that one may attend or visit, but 'the University'– no. Like a website or a virtual garden in a computer program, or indeed like a mythical country such as Erewhon – all can be said to exist, but whereness does not apply; they are unlocated.

As we cross the border into the realm of the Unconditioned (if such a metaphor is valid), there needs to be a relinquishing of such habitual concepts as self and time and place. The apprehension of Ultimate Truth (paramattha sacca) necessarily involves a radical letting go of all these familiar structures.

Here, as a present-day example and to illustrate the centrality of such reliquishment, is the insight which arose for Ajahn Mahā Boowa in the period of intense practice immediately following Ajahn Mun's final passing away. It was this thought, which he describes as having arisen on its own (and more that it was heard rather than thought) which led to Ajahn Mahā Boowa's full enlightenment shortly thereafter.

> 9.1) "If there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that is the essence of a level of being."
> ~ Ajahn Mahā Boowa, 'Straight from the Heart,' p 171

Secondly, we can take up the Buddha's own words on the nature of Nibbāna or asaṅkhata-dhamma, the Unconditioned Reality.

> 9.2) "There is that sphere where there is no earth, no water, no fire nor wind; no sphere of infinity of space, of infinity of consciousness, of nothingness or even of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; there, there is neither this world nor the other world, neither moon nor sun; this sphere I call neither a coming nor a going nor a staying still, neither a dying nor a reappearance; it has no basis, no evolution and no support: this, just this, is the end of dukkha."
> ~ Ud 8.1

> 9.3) "There is the Unborn, Uncreated, Unconditioned and

> Unformed. If there were not, there would be no escape discerned from that which is born, created, conditioned and formed. But, since there is this Unborn, Uncreated, Unconditioned and Unformed, escape is therefore discerned from that which is born, created, conditioned and formed."
> ~ Ud 8.3, Iti 43

It is significant that, when the Buddha makes such statements as these, he uses a different Pali verb 'to be' than the usual one. The vast majority of uses of the verb employ the Pali 'hoti'; this is the ordinary type of being, implying existence in time and space: I am happy; she is a fine horse; the house is small; the days are long. In these passages just quoted, when the Buddha makes his rare but emphatic metaphysical statements, he uses the verb 'atthi' instead. It still means 'to be' but some Buddhist scholars (notably Peter Harvey) insist that there is a different order of being implied: that it points to a reality which transcends the customary bounds of time, space, duality and individuality.

> 9.4) "One who is dependent has wavering. One who is independent has no wavering. There being no wavering, there is calm. There being calm, there is no desire or inclination. There being no desire or inclination, there is no coming or going. There being no coming or going, there is no passing away or arising. There being no passing away or arising, there is neither a here nor a there nor a between-the-two. This, just this, is the end of dukkha."
> ~ Ud 8.4

> 9.5) The concepts of coming-and-going are relative to the standpoint already taken in the process of identification. A relationship having been thus established between one's present identity and a possible future state, there follows the corollary – 'death-and-birth' – with its note of finality. With it, relative distinctions of a 'here,' a 'there' and a 'midway-between' also set in. The entire process, whether it be understood in the context of the epicycle of Saṃsāra traceable to every moment of living experience, or in the context of the larger cycle of Saṃsāra rolling in time and space, is a perpetual alternation between a 'this-ness' and an 'otherwise-ness' (itthabhāvaññathābhāvaṃ).

> Now, the Such-like One who sees the danger in resorting to 'supports' which only give way underneath, grasps at nothing and clings to nothing. He has given up all standpoints (see Kālakārāma Sutta at §6.8), and in so doing, has discovered a basis for firmness which never betrays. His is an unshakeable Deliverance of the Mind (akuppā cetovimutti) since he is free from attachment (anurodha) and repugnance (virodha) in the face of the worldly vicissitudes of "gain and loss, honour and dishonour, praise and blame, happiness and unhappiness" (see A 4.157)... The Buddha's declaration in the Kālakārāma Sutta – "Thus, monks, the Tathāgata being Such-like in regard to all phenomena seen, heard, sensed and cognized, is 'Such'" – is an allusion to this 'uninfluenced' mind of the emancipated one.
> ~ Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, 'The Magic of the Mind,' pp 53-55, (abridged)

To illustrate this domain, and its intractability to the mind that wants to fix reality on its own habitual, materialistic terms, here are some verses from the Mūlamadyamaka-kārika ('The Treatise on the Root of the Middle Way') of Ācariya Nāgārjuna. It is a brilliant exposition on exactly how the skilful use of the principles of conditionality and dependent origination can be used to bring about the realization of Nibbāna.

> 9.6) Investigation of Nirvāṇa
> 1. If everything were empty, there would be no arising and perishing. From the letting go of and ceasing of what could one assert nirvāṇa(-ing)?
> 2. If everything were not empty, there would be no arising and perishing. From the letting go of and ceasing of what could one assert nirvāṇa(-ing)?
> 3. No letting go, no attainment, no annihilation, no permanence, no cessation, no birth: that is spoken of as nirvāṇa.
> 4. Nirvāṇa is not a thing. Then it would follow that it would have the characteristics of aging and death. There does not exist any thing that is without aging and death.
> 5. If nirvāṇa were a thing, nirvāṇa would be a conditioned phenomena. There does not exist any thing anywhere that is not a conditioned phenomenon.

6. If nirvāṇa were a thing, how would nirvāṇa not be dependent? There does not exist any thing at all that is not dependent.
7. If nirvāṇa were not a thing, how could it possibly be nothing? The one for whom nirvāṇa is not a thing, for him it is not nothing.
8. If nirvāṇa were nothing, how could nirvāṇa possibly be not dependent? There does not exist any nothing which is not dependent.
9. Whatever things come and go are dependent or caused. Not being dependent and not being caused is taught to be nirvāṇa.
10. The teacher taught [it] to be the letting go of arising and perishing. Therefore, it is correct that nirvāṇa is not a thing or nothing.
11. If nirvāṇa were both a thing and nothing, it would follow that it would be a thing or nothing. That is incorrect.
12. If nirvāṇa were both a thing and nothing, nirvāṇa would not be not-dependent, because it would depend on those two.
13. How could nirvāṇa be both a thing and nothing? Nirvāṇa is unconditioned; things and nothings are conditioned.
14. How could nirvāṇa exist as both a thing and nothing? Those two do not exist as one. They are like light and dark.
15. The presentation of neither a thing nor nothing as nirvāṇa will be established [only] if things and nothings are established.
16. If nirvāṇa is neither a thing nor nothing, by who could 'neither a thing nor nothing' be perceived?
17. After the Bhagavan has entered nirvāṇa, one cannot perceive [him? it?] as 'existing,' likewise as 'not existing,' nor can one perceive [him? it?] as 'both' or 'neither.'
18. Even when the Bhagavan is alive, one cannot perceive [him? it?] as 'existing,' likewise as 'not existing,' nor can one perceive [him? it?] as 'both' or 'neither.'
19. Saṃsāra does not have the slightest distinction from nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa does not have the slightest distinction from saṃsāra.
20. Whatever is the end of nirvāṇa, that is the end of saṃsara. There is not even a very subtle, slight distinction between the two.
21. Views about who passes beyond, ends etc. and permanence etc. are contingent upon nirvāṇa and latter ends and former ends.

> 22. In the emptiness of all things what ends are there? What non-ends are there? What ends and non-ends are there? What of neither are there?
> 23. Is there this? Is there the other? Is there permanence? Is there impermanence? Is there both permance and impermanence? Is there neither?
> 24. Totally pacifying all referents and totally pacifying fixations is peace. The Buddha nowhere taught any dharma to anyone.
> ~ Ācariya Nāgārjuna, Mūlamadyamaka-kārika, Ch 25, (Stephen Batchelor trans.)

The purpose of these passages is to cut to the heart of our habitual delusions about time and self and things; they teach us how to counteract the dictates of the conditioned mind and point to the fact that, in Ultimate Reality, there is no arising and no passing, and furthermore no substantial beings or things to be arising and passing away.

Some similar areas of Dhamma were examined a few centuries before Ācariya Nāgārjuna, and were recorded in 'The Questions of King Milinda.' It is significant, in the following exchange between the Elder and the King, how the element of morality (sīla) and its rôle in the realization of Nibbāna, are brought firmly into prominence.

> 9.7) Nibbāna is neither past nor future nor present;
> It is neither produced nor not produced nor to be produced,
> Yet it exists, and may be realized.
> ~ Miln 323, (E.W. Burlingame trans.)

> 9.8) Nibbāna Is Not A Place
> "Reverend Nāgasena, is this region in the East, or in the South, or in the West, or in the North, or above or below or across – this region where Nibbāna is located?"
> "Great king, the region does not exist, either in the East, or in the South, or in the West, or in the North, or above or below or across, where Nibbāna is located."
> "If, Reverend Nāgasena, there is no place where Nibbāna is located, then there is no Nibbāna; and as for those who have realized Nibbāna, their realization also is vain. Let me tell you why I think so:

"Reverend Nāgasena, just as on earth, a field is the place of origin of crops, a flower is the place of origin of odors, a bush is the place of origin of flowers, a tree is the place of origin of fruits, a mine is the place of origin of jewels, insomuch that whoever desires anything, has but to go to the proper place and get it – precisely so, Reverend Nāgasena, if Nibbāna really exists, it also follows that a place of origin of this Nibbāna must be postulated. But since, Reverend Nāgasena, there is no place of origin of Nibbāna, therefore I say: There is no Nibbāna; and as for those who have realized Nibbāna: Their realization also is vain."

"Great king, there is no place where Nibbāna is located. Nevertheless, this Nibbāna really exists; and a man, by ordering his walk aright [practising wisely], by diligent mental effort, realizes Nibbāna.

"Great king, just as there is such a thing as fire, but no place where it is located – the fact being that a man, by rubbing two sticks together, produces fire – so also, great king, there is such a thing as Nibbāna, but no place where it is located – the fact being that a man, by ordering his walk aright [practising wisely], by diligent mental effort, realizes Nibbāna..."

"Reverend Nāgasena, let it be granted that there is no place where Nibbāna is located. But is there a place where a man must stand to order his walk aright [practise wisely], and realize Nibbāna?"

"Yes, great king, there is a place where a man must stand to order his walk aright [practise wisely], and realize Nibbāna."

"But what, Reverend Sir, is the place where a man must stand to order his walk aright [practise wisely] and realize Nibbāna?"

"Morality, great king, is the place! Abiding steadfast in Morality, putting forth diligent mental effort – whether in the land of the Scythians or in the land of the Greeks, whether in China or in Tartary, whether in Alexandria or in Nikumba, whether in Kāsi or in Kosala, whether in Cashmere or in Gandhāra, whether on a mountain-top or in the highest heaven – no matter where a man may stand, by ordering his walk aright [practising wisely], he realizes Nibbāna."

"Good, Reverend Nāgasena! You have made it plain what Nibbāna is, you have made it plain what the realization of Nibbāna is, you have well-described the Power of Morality, you

> have made it plain how a man orders his walk aright [practises wisely], you have uplifted the Banner of Truth, you have set the Eye of Truth in its socket, you have demonstrated that Right Effort on the part of those who put forth diligent effort is not barren. It is just as you say most excellent of excellent teachers! I agree absolutely!"
> ~ Miln 326-328, (E.W. Burlingame trans.)

To underscore the quality of placelessness, the non-locality of Dhamma, here we have Ajahn Chah's final message to Ajahn Sumedho, which was sent by letter (a rare if not unique occurrence) in the summer of 1981. Shortly after this was received at Chithurst Forest Monastery in England, Ajahn Chah suffered the stroke that left him paralysed and mute for the last ten years of his life.

> 9.9) Whenever you have feelings of love or hate for anything whatsoever, these will be your aides and partners in building pāramitā. The Buddha-Dhamma is not to be found in moving forwards, nor in moving backwards, nor in standing still. This, Sumedho, is your place of non-abiding.
> ~ Ajahn Chah

This was by no means the first time that Ajahn Chah had used this expression – on neither moving forwards, backwards nor standing still (e.g. see 'Food for the Heart – collected teachings of Ajahn Chah,' p 339) – but it is perhaps significant that these were the words he chose to write as final instructions to one of his closest and most influential disciples.

This centrality of the principle that he is pointing to – that the conundrum can only be solved through non-identification with self, time and location – is also alluded to by the opening sutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya.

> 9.10) A devatā asked the Buddha:
> "How, dear sir, did you cross the flood?"
> "By not halting, friend, and by not straining I crossed the flood."
> "But how is it, dear sir, that by not halting and by not straining you crossed the flood?"
> "When I came to a standstill, friend, then I sank; but when I struggled, then I got swept away. It is in this way, friend, that by not halting and by not straining I crossed the flood."
> ~ S 1.1, (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

This finding of the subtle Middle Way, which transcends the two extremes rather than being just halfway between them, is a theme that is repeated throughout the Pali Canon. It is addressed particularly in the teaching to Bāhiya (§3.6), in Iti 94 (§3.7), in Iti 49 (§§5.30,13.24), as well as numerous other places.

Perhaps a simple analogy for the finding of this mysterious Middle is to be found, once again, in the three-dimensional 'magic eye' pictures. At first glance such pictures seem to be a blur of print, perhaps with no distinct forms discernable in them at all. The extreme of 'coming to a standstill' or 'holding back' would be to turn away and ignore the picture.

The extreme of 'struggling' or 'overreaching' would be to stare at the page intently, rigorously following the instructions to hold it at the right distance and focus beyond the surface, but so eager to find the hidden image that the eyes cross and uncross, vision blurs until eventually one gets a headache and gives up.

It's only when there is the interest, the correct methodology, and a relaxed attention to the process that we find the palm trees and dinosaurs, the swooping eagle emerging from the confused blur. And, moreover, formed in a distinct three-dimensional realm that no amount of force or trickery or blind obedience to a formula can reveal.

Another analogy that might be useful when investigating these areas where habitual approaches and language no longer apply is in the nature of the subatomic realm. Scientists have found that conventional notions of space and time cease to have much relevance below the Planck scale (i.e. distances less than 10^{-35} m). Such ultramicroscopic examinations of the world leave us, similarly, in a vastly different conceptual landscape, for they too describe an arena of the universe in which the conventional notions of left and right, back and forth, up and down, and even before and after, lose their meaning.

In sum, the mind cannot be said to be truly anywhere. Furthermore, material things, ultimately, cannot be said to be anywhere either. "There is no 'there' there," as Gertrude Stein famously put it. The world of our perceptions is a realm of convenient fictions – there is nothing solid or separate to be found in either the domain of the subject or that of the object, whether it be an act of cognition, an emotion, the song of a bird or this book that you hold in your hands. However, even though all attributes of subject and object might be unlocated and thus ungraspable, with wisdom they can be truly known.

10

THE UNAPPREHENDABILITY OF THE ENLIGHTENED

SO FAR WE HAVE DELVED INTO MANY OF THE SUBJECTIVE QUALITIES of the realization of Nibbāna – what it is like from the 'inside' – we will now look at how the enlightened state may be appreciated from the 'outside.' In other words, when an unenlightened person meets an enlightened one, what is it that they meet?

> 10.1) At one time the Blessed One was travelling by the road between Ukkaṭṭhā and Setavyā; and the brahmin Doṇa was travelling by that road too. He saw in the Blessed One's footprints wheels with a thousand spokes, and with rims and hubs all complete. Then he thought: "It is wonderful, it is marvellous! Surely this can never be the footprint of a human being."
>
> Then the Blessed One left the road and sat down at the root of a tree, cross-legged, with his body held erect and mindfulness established before him. Then the brahmin Doṇa, who was following up the footprints, saw him sitting at the root of the tree. The Blessed One inspired trust and confidence, his faculties being stilled, his mind quiet and attained to supreme control and serenity: a royal tusker self-controlled and guarded by restraint of the sense faculties. The brahmin went up to him and asked:
>
> "Sir, are you a god?"
>
> "No, brahmin."
>
> "Sir, are you a heavenly angel?"
>
> "No, brahmin."
>
> "Sir, are you a spirit?"
>
> "No, brahmin."
>
> "Sir, are you a human being?"
>
> "No, brahmin."
>
> "Then, sir, what indeed are you?"

> "Brahmin, the defilements by means of which, through my not having abandoned them, I might be a god or a heavenly angel or a spirit or a human being have been abandoned by me, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, done away with, and are no more subject to future arising. Just as a blue or red or white lotus is born in water, grows in water and stands up above the water untouched by it, so too I, who was born in the world and grew up in the world, have transcended the world, and I live untouched by the world.
> "Remember me as one who is awakened (buddha)."
> ~ A 4.36

A similarly unique and illuminating exchange occurred in more recent times, at Ajahn Chah's monastery, Wat Nong Pah Pong, in the 1970s.

> 10.2) A visiting Zen student asked Ajahn Chah, "How old are you? Do you live here all year round?"
> "I live nowhere," he replied. "There is no place you can find me. I have no age. To have age you must exist, and to think you exist is already a problem. Don't make problems; then the world has none either. Don't make a self. There's nothing more to say."
> ~ 'No Ajahn Chah,' back cover

> 10.3) Once there was a layman who came to Ajahn Chah and asked him who Ajahn Chah was. Ajahn Chah, seeing that the spiritual development of the individual was not very advanced, pointed to himself and said, "This, this is Ajahn Chah."
> On another occasion, Ajahn Chah was asked the same question by someone else. This time, however, seeing that the questioner's capacity to understand the Dhamma was higher, Ajahn Chah answered by saying, "Ajahn Chah? There is NO Ajahn Chah."
> ~ ibid, epigraph

From these few brief exchanges (also bearing in mind Ajahn Chah's 'autobiography' at §5.36) one can deduce that one cannot reckon the issue in terms of 'meeting another person' – all of our familiar handholds on identity and personality are called into question. The following passage is another very well-known and much-quoted instance of this principle.

The story so far is that the bhikkhu Vakkali has fallen gravely ill and the Buddha has come from his dwelling at the Squirrels' Sanctuary in the Bamboo Grove, near Rājagaha, to pay him a visit. The Buddha asks him how he is doing and, after recounting to the Master that his sickness is worsening, he expresses the one regret remaining in his heart.

> 10.4) "For a long time, venerable sir, I have wanted to come and see the Blessed One, but I haven't been fit enough to do so." "Enough, Vakkali; why do you want to see this filthy body? One who sees the Dhamma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dhamma. For it is when one sees the Dhamma that they see me; and it is when they see me that they see the Dhamma. How do you conceive this, Vakkali, is material form permanent or impermanent?..."
> ~ S 22.87

The Buddha then went on to repeat the discourse on selflessness (Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta) which he had given to the group of five bhikkhus after the enlightenment. The key phrase in Pali reads: "Yo kho Vakkali Dhammaṃ passati, so maṃ passati. Yo maṃ passati, so Dhammaṃ passati." The ancient commentary says on this:

> 10.5) Here the Blessed One shows (himself as) the Dhamma-body, as stated in the passage, "The Tathāgata, great king, is the Dhamma-body." For the ninefold supramundane Dhamma is called the Tathāgata's body.
> ~ Saṃyutta Nikāya, note 168, p 1081, (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Even though this exact statement cannot be traced in the Pali Canon, Bhikkhu Bodhi suggests that it might be a misquotation of the Aggañña Sutta.

> 10.6) "This designates the Tathāgata: 'The Body of Dhamma,' [dhamma-kāya], that is 'The Body of Brahmā,' or 'Become Dhamma,' that is, 'Become Brahmā.'"
> ~ D 27.9, (Maurice Walshe trans.)

Both of these passages are echoed somewhat in the following exultation of Ven. Mahā-Kaccāna.

> 10.7) “For knowing, the Blessed One knows; seeing, he sees; he is vision, he is knowledge, he is the Dhamma; he is the holy one; he is the sayer, the proclaimer, the elucidator of meaning, the giver of the Deathless, the Lord of the Dhamma, the Tathāgata!”
> ~ M 18.12

This gives us a little more to go on but since the Dhamma itself is classically designated in the sparest of terms – “apparent here and now; timeless; encouraging investigation; leading inwards; to be experienced by each wise person for themselves” – there is still very little here to grasp by way of tangible characterization, and quite deliberately so. If we think that we’ll have more to play with in the phrase “the ninefold supramundane Dhamma is called the Tathāgata’s body,” we will again be disappointed, those ‘nine’ refer to the four Paths, their four Fruitions and Nibbāna – the states of mind established in wisdom and purity, not any kind of substance or personal characteristic.

Later Buddhist traditions have laid great emphasis on the Dharmakāya as the most universal and refined of the three kāyas of the Buddha: Nirmāṇakāya – physical body; Sambhogakāya – the body of bliss/subtle, etheric body; Dharmakāya – universal and timeless body, the absolute aspect of the Buddha’s mind, unborn and omniscient. Extensive and grandiloquent descriptions exist of its nature and qualities but the texts of the Southern School are remarkably quiet on the matter.

Probably the most that can or needs to be said is that, from the Theravāda point of view, the Buddha is the perfect embodiment of the Dhamma. His effort in speaking in these minimalist ways seems designed to meet two purposes: firstly, to reflect the ultimately nonpersonal and indefinable nature of Ultimate Reality; secondly (and principally) to awaken in the minds of his listeners the insight which is holy and liberating. Another related and well-known example of the Buddha’s teachings on this area is found in the Itivuttaka.

> 10.8) This was said by the Lord…
> “Bhikkhus, even though a bhikkhu might hold on to the hem of my robe and follow close behind me step by step, if he is covetous for objects of desire, strongly passionate, malevolent, corrupt in thought, unmindful, uncomprehending, unconcentrated, of wandering mind and uncontrolled faculties, he is far from me and I am far from him. What is the reason? That bhikkhu does not see Dhamma. Not seeing Dhamma, he does not see me.

"Bhikkhus, even though a bhikkhu might live a hundred leagues away, if he is not covetous for objects of desire, not strongly passionate, not malevolent, not corrupt in thought, with mindfulness established, clearly comprehending, concentrated, of unified mind and controlled faculties, he is close to me and I am close to him. What is the reason? That bhikkhu sees Dhamma. Seeing Dhamma, he sees me."
~ Iti 92

10.9) "They call him Buddha, Enlightened, Awake, dissolving darkness, with total vision, and knowing the world to its ends, he has gone beyond all the states of being and of becoming. He has no inner poison-drives: he is the total elimination of suffering. This man, brahmin Bāvari, is the man I follow.
"It is like a bird that leaves the bushes of the scrubland and flies to the fruit trees of the forest. I too have left the bleary half-light of opinions; like a swan I have reached a great lake.
"Up till now, before I heard Gotama's teaching, people had always told me this: 'This is how it has always been, and this is how it will always be'; only the constant refrain of tradition, a breeding ground for speculation.
"This prince, this beam of light, Gotama, was the only one who dissolved the darkness. This man Gotama is a universe of wisdom and a world of understanding, a teacher whose Dhamma is the Way Things Are, instant, immediate and visible all around, eroding desire without harmful side-effects, with nothing else quite like it anywhere in the world."
"But Piṅgiya," said Bāvari, "why then don't you spend all your time, your every moment, with this man Gotama, this universe of wisdom… with nothing else quite like it anywhere in the world?"
"Brahmin, Sir," said Piṅgiya, "there is no moment for me, however small, that is spent away from Gotama, from this universe of wisdom… with nothing else quite like it anywhere in the world…
"I cannot now move away from the teaching of Gotama: the powers of confidence and joy, of intellect and awareness, hold me there. Whichever way this universe of wisdom goes, it draws me with it."
~ SN 1133-43, (Ven. H. Saddhatissa trans.)

Returning to the theme of 'unapprehendability': one who has reached the end of the spiritual path is said to be indescribable because they no longer identify with any of the customary things by which they might be described, thus they cannot be measured by them either.

> 10.10) "Bhikkhu, if one has an underlying tendency towards something, then one is measured in accordance with it; if one is measured in accordance with something, then one will be reckoned in terms of it. If one does not have an underlying tendency towards something, then one is not measured in accordance with it; if one is not measured in accordance with something, then one will not be reckoned in terms of it...
> "If... one has an underlying tendency towards material form, feeling, perception, mental formations or consiousness then one will be measured in accordance with it; if one is measured in accordance with it, then one will be reckoned in terms of it.
> "If one has no underlying tendency towards material form, feeling, perception, mental formations or consiousness then one will not be measured in accordance with it; if one is not measured in accordance with it, then one will not be reckoned in terms of it."
> ~ S 22.36

> 10.11) "Greed is a maker of measurement (pamāṇakaraṇa), hatred is a maker of measurement, delusion is a maker of measurement. In one whose heart is utterly pure, these are abandoned, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, done away with so that they are no longer subject to future arising. Of all the kinds of immeasurable deliverance of mind, the unshakeable deliverance of mind is pronounced the best. That unshakeable deliverance of mind is empty of greed, empty of hatred, empty of delusion."
> ~ M 43.35

> 10.12) This was said by the Lord...
> "Bhikkhus, there are these three times. What three? Past time, future time and present time. These, bhikkhus, are the three times."
> "Perceiving what's expressed through concepts,
> beings take their stand on that;

> not fully understanding it,
> they fall into the grip of Death.
>
> "But understanding what's expressed,
> one does not misconceive the speaker.
> That one's mind is fully freed
> into a peace that's unsurpassed.
>
> "Understanding what's expressed,
> one who's at peace
> delights in that.
> Firm in Dhamma, knowledge perfect,
> they classify
> but can't be classified."
> ~ Iti 63

> 10.13) "Bhikkhus, when the gods with Indra, with Brahmā and with Pajāpati seek a bhikkhu who is thus liberated in mind, they do not find anything of which they could say: 'The consciousness of one thus gone is supported by this.' Why is that? One thus gone, I say, is untraceable here and now."
> ~ M 22.36

The Buddha summarized the cause for this mysterious unapprehendability in another of his dialogues with Vacchagotta.

> 10.14) "So too, Vaccha, the Tathāgata has abandoned that material form by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him; he has cut it all off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it so that it is no longer subject to future arising. The Tathāgata is liberated from being reckoned in terms of material form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness, Vaccha, he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable like the ocean."
> ~ M 72.20

The preceding statement is also found in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, in the opening entry of the Connected Discourses on the Undeclared – a rich and fascinating collection of teachings. The sutta recounts a meeting between the

arahant bhikkhunī Khemā, and King Pasenadi of Kosala. The King had been travelling between Sāketa and Sāvatthi and, having to stop overnight in Toraṇavatthu, he had asked if there were any local samaṇas or brahmins whom he might visit and with whom he might have some spiritual discussion. The man sent out to search returns, and says:

> 10.15) "Sire, there are no samaṇas or brahmins in Toraṇavatthu whom your Majesty could visit. But, sire, there is the bhikkhunī Khemā, a disciple of the Blessed One… Now a good report concerning this revered lady has been spread abroad thus: 'She is wise, competent, intelligent, learned, a splendid speaker, ingenious.' Let your Majesty visit her."

The King opens the dialogue by asking her whether a Tathāgata exists after death or not, in the familiar quadrilemmal form of the question. To each of the four lemmas (exists, doesn't exist, both does and does not, neither does nor does not) she replies: "The Tathāgata has not declared this." His perplexed Majesty then asks:

> "What now, revered lady, is the cause and reason that this has not been declared by the Blessed One?"
> "Well then, great king, I will question you about this same matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think, great king? Do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician who can count the grains of sand in the river Ganges thus: 'There are so many grains of sand…'?"
> "No, revered lady."
> "Then, great king, do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician who can measure the water in the great ocean thus: 'There are so many gallons of water…'?"
> "No, revered lady. For what reason? Because the great ocean is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom."
> "So too, great king, the Tathāgata has abandoned that material form… feeling… perception… mental formations… consciousness by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him… he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom, like the great ocean."
> ~ S 44.1

The intangible, inscrutable yet powerfully present quality which is being

referred to in these dialogues was a feature of early Buddhist iconography in the pre-Greek era in northern India. For example, at the great stūpa at Amarāvati in Andhra Pradesh, and on many of the monuments of King Asoka, the Buddha was not represented in human form. There were a variety of ways in which his presence was depicted: as a pair of footprints, an empty chair, a stūpa, the Bodhi tree, a Dhamma wheel – all images designed to evoke something of the presence but explicitly avoiding encapsulating and confining the Buddha principle within the narrowness of the human form.

The 'unapprehendability principle' did not fade away completely with the introduction of the human form into religious sculpture and the emergence of the style of Buddha images which are so familiar today. In Borobudur – one of the largest Buddhist shrines in the world – the designers and architects conceived a way of displaying this subtle and esoteric teaching in the black volcanic stone of Java, where the great edifice is to be found. Each successive layer of the stūpa, from the ground up, is given to a depiction of some aspect of the Buddha's life and lives. The lower layers carry bas-reliefs of the colourful rough and tumble of incidents from the Buddha's previous lives; above these come the events of his last birth, as Siddhartha Gautama, the enlightenment and stories of his teaching career. Above these, the square form of the stūpa transmutes to the circular, with an impressive guard of images of the Dhyāni Buddha Amoghasiddhi – all in the abhaya or 'fearlessness' mudrā – rimming the parapet of the highest of the square levels.

At this same stage, small stūpas appear in concentric formation, with regular square holes in the 'bell' of each one, revealing a Buddha image within. One level higher and further rings of this same model of small stūpa have diamond-shaped perforations in them instead – somewhat smaller than the square holes and rendering the Buddha images within yet harder to discern. By the next level we have reached the summit and found a much larger and notably plain stūpa crowning the structure. There are no holes through which to see inside.

Needless to say, the thirteen centuries or so that have passed since Burobudur was first constructed have wrought major ravages to the shrine. In the 1970s, UNESCO launched a restoration campaign and the vast complex has since been repaired and returned to something of its original glory.

During the course of excavations the great stūpa at the crown was opened and entered. Its interior revealed that it too had a Buddha image inside but when it was examined closely it was found to have a strange, altogether unique feature: one of the hands was unformed and seemed to meld into the leg upon which it rested; in several places raw rock seemed to interplay with the living being who was represented there. The initial supposition was that the image was

unfinished and maybe was installed "in a hurry," for some undefined reason. One would have thought that a thousand years or so would have given plenty of time to replace it or finish it, if that was what was intended. Instead the hidden, half-defined image seems to fit perfectly the theme of ascent of the holy mountain being unified with increasing unapprehendability: the higher you go the more impressive yet the more out-of-reach the Buddha principle becomes. The walled-in nature of the ultimate image and its half-emergence from the virgin stone: Is he here? Is he gone? What is he? – expresses well the 'deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom, untraceable, unapprehendable' nature of the Tathāgata.

It is also worthy of note that such a principle has not solely been the province of Buddhist thought and expression. There are also strong traditions of 'non-representation' in both Judaism and Islam. Both of these theistic religious forms, particularly in their more orthodox expressions, absolutely forbid the depiction of God in physical form.

The name of God is considered to be unutterable – to be pronounced but once a year by the high priest alone in the holy of holies, in the case of Judaism. In some Jewish writing the form 'G – d' is used, or 'Y – – h' to resonate that same respectful prohibition. The unique and dazzling artistic forms of calligraphy and geometric patterns employed in Islamic tradition arose because, for some lineages, not only is God not to be represented in physical form but also via any living creation – thus only abstract forms can be used in their religious artwork.

The principle is also found within the Christian tradition, particularly among the mystics and contemplatives; for example:

> 10.16) When we give a thing a name we imagine we have got hold of it. We imagine that we have got hold of being. Perhaps we should do better not to flatter ourselves too soon that we can name God.
> ~ Gregory of Nyssa

> 10.17) God, who has no name – who is beyond names – is inexpressible.
> ~ Meister Eckhart

Both of these passages, along with the observation that in the Jewish tradition an empty throne was also used as a symbol for the presence of God, are quoted in a chapter entitled 'Prayer Without Language in the Mystical Tradition,' in the book 'The Solace of Fierce Landscapes' by Belden C. Lane. In a similar vein, as Wittgenstein put it in the dénouement of his Tractatus:

> 10.18) What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence. (Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen.)
> ~ L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (Proposition 7)

The clearest analyses of the principle of unapprehendability to be found in the Pali Canon occur side-by-side in the Connected Discourses on the Khandhas.

> 10.19) Once some wanderers of other sects went to the venerable Anurādha and asked him: "Friend Anurādha, one who is a Tathāgata, highest of beings, the supreme among beings, one attained to the supreme attainment, when a Tathāgata is describing them, in which of the four following instances do they describe them: After death a Tathāgata is; or after death a Tathāgata is not; or after death a Tathāgata both is and is not; or after death a Tathāgata neither is nor is not?"
> "Friends, a Tathāgata in describing them describes them apart from these four instances."
> When this was said they remarked: "This must be a new bhikkhu, not long gone forth; or, if he is an elder, he must be foolish and incompetent." Then, having no confidence in the venerable Anurādha and thinking him newly gone forth or foolish, they got up from their seats and went away. Then, soon after they had gone he wondered: "If they had questioned me further, how should I have answered them so that I might say what the Blessed One says without misrepresenting him with what is not fact and might express ideas in accordance with the Dhamma with nothing legitimately deducible from my assertions that would provide grounds for condemning me?" So he went to the Blessed One and told him about this.
> "How do you conceive this, Anurādha, is material form permanent or impermanent?"
> "Impermanent, venerable sir."

The Buddha then continued as he had done in the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, which he had spoken to his friends, the group of five bhikkhus (S 22.59, MV 1.6), after which he asked:

> "How do you conceive this, Anurādha: do you see material form as the Tathāgata?"
> "No, venerable sir." – "Do you see feeling … perception … mental formations … consciousness as the Tathāgata?"
> "No, venerable sir."
> "How do you conceive this, Anurādha: do you see the Tathāgata as in material form?"
> "No, venerable sir."
> "Do you see the Tathāgata as apart from material form?"
> "No, venerable sir."
> "Do you see the Tathāgata as in feeling … as apart from feeling … as in perception … as apart from perception … as in mental formations … as apart from mental formations … as in consciousness … as apart from consciousness?"
> "No, venerable sir."
> "How do you conceive this, Anurādha: do you see the Tathāgata as being all five khandhas together: material form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness?"
> "No, venerable sir."
> "How do you conceive this, Anurādha: do you see the Tathāgata as that which has no material form, no feeling, no perception, no mental formations, no consciousness?"
> "No, venerable sir."
> "Anurādha, when a Tathāgata is here and now unapprehendable by you as true and established, is it fitting to say of him: 'Friends, one who is a Tathāgata, highest of beings, the supreme among beings, one attained to the supreme attainment, when a Tathāgata is describing them, he describes them apart from the following four instances: After death a Tathāgata is; or after death a Tathāgata is not; or after death a Tathāgata both is and is not, or after death a Tathāgata neither is nor is not?'"
> "No, venerable sir."
> "Good, good Anurādha. What I describe, now as formerly, is dukkha (suffering) and the ending of dukkha."
> ~ S 22.86, S 44.2

The other, closely related teaching is a dialogue between Ven. Sāriputta and a bhikkhu named Yamaka in whom the view had arisen that, after the death

of the body, enlightened beings are "annihilated and they perish, they do not exist after death." His companions in the holy life benevolently endeavour to shift him from this position but he stubbornly sticks to his opinion. This causes some of them to go off and find Ven. Sāriputta to let him know of Yamaka's view.

After the day's meditation is over, the wise elder comes to visit Yamaka for a chat. After Ven. Sāriputta has established that the word from the brothers on Ven. Yamaka's views is correct, the dialogue proceeds exactly as that between the Buddha and Anurādha. Happily, in the light of Sāriputta's insightful examination, Yamaka relinquishes his view; then, just to check that he's now got it right, the elder asks him:

> 10.20) "If, friend Yamaka, they were to ask you: 'Friend Yamaka, when a bhikkhu is an arahant, one whose heart is pure, what happens to him with the breakup of the body, after death?' – being asked thus, what would you answer?"
> "If they were to ask me this, friend, I would answer thus: 'Friends, material form is impermanent; what is impermanent is unsatisfactory; what is unsatisfactory has ceased and passed away.... so too with feeling... perception... mental formations... consciousness...' Being asked thus, friend, I would answer in such a way."
> "Good, good, friend Yamaka!"
> ~ S 22.85

The Ven. Sāriputta then goes on to draw a potent if chilling simile: he compares the five khandhas to an assassin who wins the confidence of a person and takes up the role of their servant, only in order to get close so that they may "ruin, harm, endanger, take that person's life." When the would-be murderer becomes aware that the person "has placed trust in them, finding them alone, they would take their life with a sharp knife." Such is the treacherous result for the uninstructed worldling who places their trust and takes refuge in the five khandhas.

There are a few points in these two dialogues which are particularly worthy of note. Firstly, the five modes of relationship posited as possible for a Tathāgata in reference to the khandhas – identity with (or being); existing within; existing apart from; having; not having – describe a comprehensive schema for the habits of identification. As described in Chapter 5, all forms of positioning of a self whatsoever, whether in terms of being or non-being, or as here in terms of a) identity, b) location or c) ownership, all of these have been abandoned by the enlightened ones. This

formulation precisely maps the variety of ways in which we tend to define what we are – irrespective of whether such definitions are couched in positive or negative terms. Then, having neatly bundled them together, it points out to us that all definitions are necessarily wrong since they are based on invalid premises; like asking "Where exactly in the television does the newsreader live?" Or, as asked at §9.8 "Where is Nibbāna located?" or at §11.2, "When a fire goes out, does it go north, south, east or west?"

Further to this, one would have thought at first glance that Anurādha's response to the wanderers ("Friends, a Tathāgata in describing an enlightened one describes them apart from these four instances") was close enough to the mark. He at least seems to be holding the party line on not going along with the familiar quadrilemma – a formulation that appears to cover every conceivable angle of being, certainly one more thorough than any with which the average reader would be acquainted.

For the Buddha, however, as this expression fails to accord with the reality, he pulls Anurādha up on it and makes it the occasion for this fine teaching. For, in saying that an enlightened being is "described apart from these four instances," he is unconsciously and tacitly implying that there is some other meta-dimension of being that the quadrilemma has missed and which is the actual abiding place of Tathāgatas after the death of the body. Not so.

In this light it is striking how, after the dismantling of all possible subtle position-taking, both suttas relocate the issue to the essence of the Teaching: dukkha and the ending of dukkha. These passages resonate with the Buddha's emphatic declaration to Mālunkyaputta on why he left certain things undeclared (M 63.7-10), while Ven. Yamaka's words in particular are reminiscent of those uttered by the arahant bhikkhunī Vajirā (at §5.35) and by the Buddha to Ven. Mahā-Kaccāna (at §5.32) "What arises is only suffering arising, and what ceases is only suffering ceasing."

The following dialogue between the Ven. Mahā-Koṭṭhita and the Ven. Sāriputta echoes the same principle but uses a different angle of approach.

> 10.21) "When the six sense-spheres fade and cease without remainder, is it the case that there is anything else?"
> "Do not say that, my friend."
> "Is it the case that there is not anything else?"
> "Do not say that, my friend."
> "Is it the case that there both is and is not anything else?"
> "Do not say that, my friend."

> "Is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?"
> "Do not say that, my friend."
> "Being asked... if there is anything else, you say, 'Do not say that, my friend.' Being asked... if there is not anything else... if there both is and is not anything else... if there neither is nor is not anything else, you say, 'Do not say that, my friend.' Now, how is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"
> "By saying, '... Is it the case that there is anything else? ... Is it the case that there is not anything else? ... Is it the case that there both is and is not anything else? ... Is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?' – one is differentiating non-differentiation. However far the range of the six sense-spheres reaches, that is how far differentiation goes. However far differentiation goes, that is how far the range of the six sense-spheres reaches. When the six sense-spheres fade and cease without remainder, there is then the cessation, the allaying of differentiation."
> ~ A 4.174

The Pali for "one is differentiating non-differentiation" is "appapañcaṃ papañceti," literally, "complicates the uncomplicated." Papañca is often taken to mean 'illusion.' It also has the meaning of 'prolixity' or 'conceptual proliferation.' The Buddha is described as 'nippapañca' – one who is free of this tendency. A key teaching on this subject is to be found in the Madhupiṇḍika Sutta (as at §6.9).

The encouragement that Ven. Sāriputta makes here – not to apply a means beyond its natural limitations – is also very apposite. There is an extremely strong tendency within most people to want to fill up the unknown, the ineffable, with a belief, with hope or fear, or, as with Anurādha and Yamaka, at least some kind of recognizable self-structure – in short to complicate the supremely uncomplicated.

As a final word, here is the Buddha, who has been addressing the Ven. Ānanda on insights into deluded views of self, culminating in liberation:

> 10.22) "And if anyone were to say to a monk whose mind was thus freed: 'The Tathāgata exists after death,' that would be [seen by him as] a wrong opinion and unfitting, likewise: 'The Tathāgata does not exist..., both exists and does not exist..., neither exists nor does not exist after death.' Why so? As far, Ānanda, as designation and the range of designation reaches, as far as

> language and the range of language reaches, as far as concepts and the range of concepts reaches, as far as understanding and the range of understanding reaches, as far as the cycle reaches and revolves – that monk is liberated from all that by super-knowledge (abhiññā), and to maintain that such a liberated monk does not know and see would be a wrong view and incorrect."
> ~ D 15.32, (Maurice Walshe trans.)

This last clause is referring to an accusation that, if a monk refuses to go along with any of the four elements of the classic quadrilemma, he therefore does not really know what lies beyond the extent of designation, language and concepts. The fact is that, if he is indeed fully enlightened, he does know and see what lies beyond, however he may not speak of it since it also lies beyond the realm of expressibility.

The next chapter deals with the Buddha's skill in sustaining this manner of approach, of not allowing concept and language to trespass beyond their appointed bounds, particularly in relationship to the nature of the enlightened once the life of the body has reached its end.

11

"'REAPPEARS' DOES NOT APPLY..."

IN HIS FRIENDLY REBUKE TO ANURĀDHA THE BUDDHA pointed out that, given that the Tathāgata was unapprehendable even while the body was both alive and present, it was even more unfitting to conceive any idea whatsoever as to what the nature of a Tathāgata might be once the body has died. It is because of this principle of unapprehendability that, in the conventions of the Buddhist tradition, one never speaks of the Buddha as having 'died.' To assert so would imply an identification with the body and personality that the Master had, since the enlightenment, ceased to possess.

It might be argued that the avoidance of such usages is simply the attempt of the faithful to legitimize their clinging to their beloved mentor. Maybe so – but a little serious investigation and contemplation of the teachings contained both in this and the previous chapter, will make it obvious that this practice is simply an exercising of the Buddha's injunctions on how to relate to the quality in question in accordance with reality.

Instead of 'death' such terms as 'attained final Nibbāna' are used, the latter words being a translation of 'Parinibbāna.' In most Buddhist literature the word Nibbāna is taken to signify Nibbāna as experienced in life and Parinibbāna as what occurs at the death of the body of an enlightened being. This is an over-simplification (e.g. in the Sutta Nipāta 'Parinibbāna' is often used to apply to a living arahant; furthermore the word can also mean the act of quenching whilst 'Nibbāna,' in that context, means the state of quenchedness) but it is fair enough to say that the above sense is what the words usually mean and that is how we will use them here.

The Buddha was extraordinarily resolute in saying nothing about what happens after the death of the body of an enlightened one; therefore, one small point to clarify at the beginning is that when the noun Parinibbāna is used to denote this, it does not mean 'Nibbāna after death.' Even though such phrases as 'gone to Parinibbāna' are in common usage, they lack technical accuracy for they can imply

that Parinibbāna is some kind of special place – a sort of super-heaven that is somehow permanent and that one never dies in or falls away from. Instead the term means, rather, the event of passing away undergone by one who has attained Nibbāna during their life.

To borrow the language of modern physics, one could aptly refer to Parinibbāna as an 'event horizon' from beyond which nothing ever returns and from whence no messages can come. Around a black hole, it is the distance from its surface beyond which the laws of gravity ensure that there can be no turning back. It is a one-way border.

Nothing can escape the powerful gravitational grip of the black hole, not even light, for lightspeed is less than the escape velocity required to leave that hyper-dense sphere. The event horizon is thus the limit of knowledge for the outside observer.

All analogies are flawed but this image well portrays the essence of the situation. Even though theories abound about what might be happening 'inside' a black hole, physicists of the calibre of Stephen Hawking have said that it's still impossible to know. All information is lost forever once something has passed the event horizon: the laws of reality that function beyond that limit; whether they form gateways to other dimensions; if they are sources of big bangs generating other universes; whether qualities and occurrences, multiple dimensionalities, curling profusions of planes of time and space that utterly defy descriptive power are there; or an awesome nothingness – all of this is unknowable. Such wonderful unknowability is the principle in question.

To begin the exploration of this border area, here are a few examples of people encountering the principle, together with the Buddha's reasoning as to why he relates to it in the way that he does.

> 11.1) Therefore, Mālunkyāputta, remember what I have left undeclared as undeclared, and remember what I have declared as declared. And what have I left undeclared?.. .[Whether] "after death a Tathāgata exists"... or "after death a Tathāgata does not exist"... or "after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist' ... or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist." Why have I not declared this? Because it is not beneficial, it does not belong to the fundamentals of the holy life, it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. That is why I have not declared it.

> And what have I declared? "This is dukkha, this its origin, this its cessation and this the path leading to its cessation," this I have declared.
> Why have I declared this? Because it is beneficial, it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life, it leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. That is why I have declared it.
> ~ M 63.7-9

One of the greatest of all the Buddha's instructional dialogues opens with the wanderer Vacchagotta asking the Buddha the standard list of ten philosophical questions (previously at §4.8). The Buddha responds to each of the ten questions by saying, "I do not hold that view." Vacchagotta is frustrated by this and asks:

> 11.2) "Then does Master Gotama hold any speculative view at all?"
> "Vaccha, 'speculative view' is something with which the Tathāgata has nothing whatsoever to do... with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up and relinquishing of all conceivings, all excogitations, all I-making, mine-making and the underlying tendency to conceit, the Tathāgata is liberated through not clinging."
> "But, Master Gotama, a bhikkhu whose mind is thus liberated: Where does he reappear [after death]?"
> "'Reappear,' Vaccha, does not apply."
> "In that case, Master Gotama, he does not reappear."
> "'Does not reappear,' Vaccha, does not apply."
> "...both does and does not reappear."
> "...does not apply.'
> "...neither does nor does not reappear."
> "...does not apply."
> "Here I am bewildered, Master Gotama, here I am confused. The small degree of understanding which had come from our earlier conversations has now disappeared."
> "Certainly you are bewildered, Vaccha. Certainly you are confused. This Dhamma is deep, Vaccha; it is hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful, sublime and beyond the scope of mere reasoning, subtle, only to be experienced by the wise. It is

difficult for those with other views, who follow other teachings, other aims and other teachers to understand.

“As this is so, I will ask you some questions. Please answer them as you like. What do you think, Vaccha, suppose a fire were burning in front of you, would you know that, ‘There is a fire burning in front of me’?”

“I would, Master Gotama.”

“And suppose someone were to ask you, Vaccha, ‘This fire burning in front of you, what is it burning dependent on?’ Thus asked, how would you reply?”

“I would reply, ‘This fire burning in front of me is burning dependent on grass and sticks.’”

“If the fire burning in front of you were to go out, would you know that, ‘This fire that was burning in front of me has gone out’?”

“I would, Master Gotama.”

“And suppose someone were to ask you, ‘This fire that was in front of you and that has now gone out, in which direction has it gone? To the east? The west? The north? The south?’ Being asked thus, how would you answer?”

“That does not apply, Master Gotama. The fire burned dependent on its fuel of grass and sticks; when its fuel is used up – if no more fuel is added to it – it is simply reckoned as ‘gone out’ (nibbuto).”

“Even so, Vaccha, the Tathāgata has abandoned any material form by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him; he has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm tree stump, deprived it of the conditions for existence and rendered it incapable of arising in the future. The Tathāgata is liberated from being reckoned in terms of material form, Vaccha, he is profound, boundless, unfathomable like the ocean. The term ‘reappears’ does not apply; the term ‘does not reappear’ does not apply; the term ‘both reappears and does not reappear’ does not apply; the term ‘neither reappears nor does not reappear’ does not apply.

“So too, any feeling… any perception… any mental formations… any consciousness by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him: that the Tathāgata has abandoned… The Tathāgata

is liberated from being reckoned in terms of consciousness, Vaccha, he is profound, boundless, unfathomable like the ocean."
~ M 72.16-20

11.3) This instruction was given by the Teacher while he was in residence at Jetavana with reference to the Elder Vaṅgīsa.
It seems that there lived at Rājagaha a brahmin named Vaṅgīsa who could tell in which of the states of existence people were reborn after death. He would rap on their skulls and say, "This is the skull of a person who has been reborn in hell; this person has been reborn as an animal; this person has been reborn as a ghost; this is the skull of a person who has been reborn in the human world."
The brahmins thought to themselves, "We can use this man to prey upon the world." So clothing him in two red robes, they took him about the country with them, saying to everyone they met, "This brahmin Vaṅgīsa can tell by rapping on the skulls of dead people in which of the states of existence they have been reborn; ask him to tell you in which of the states of existence your own kinsmen have been reborn." People would give him ten pieces of money or twenty or a hundred according to their several means, and would ask him in which of the states of existence their kinsmen had been reborn.
After travelling from place to place, they finally reached Sāvatthi and took up their abode near the Jetavana. After breakfast they saw throngs of people going with perfumes, garlands, and the like in their hands to hear the Dhamma. "Where are you going?" they asked. "To the monastery to hear the Dhamma," was the reply. "What will you gain by going there?" asked the brahmins, "There is nobody like our fellow-brahmin Vaṅgīsa. He can tell by rapping on the skulls of dead people in which of the states of existence they have been reborn. Just ask him in which of the states of existence your own kinsmen have been reborn."
"What does Vaṅgīsa know!" replied the disciples, "There is no one like our teacher." But the brahmins retorted, "There is no one like Vaṅgīsa," and the dispute waxed hot. Finally the disciples said, "Come now, let us go find out which of the two

knows the more, your Vaṅgīsa or our teacher." So taking the brahmins with them, they went to the monastery.

The Teacher, knowing that they were on their way, procured and placed in a row five skulls, one each of people who had been reborn in the four states of existence: hell, the animal world, the human world, and the worlds of the gods; and one skull belonging to a person who had attained arahantship. When they arrived, he asked Vaṅgīsa, "Are you the man of whom it is said that by rapping on the skulls of dead people you can tell in which of the states of existence they have been reborn?" – "Yes," said Vaṅgīsa. "Then whose is this skull?" Vaṅgīsa rapped on the skull and said, "This is the skull of a person who has been reborn in hell." – "Good, good!" exclaimed the Teacher, applauding him. Then the Teacher asked him about the next three skulls, and Vaṅgīsa answered without making a mistake. The Teacher applauded him for each answer he gave and finally showed him the fifth skull. "Whose skull is this?" he asked. Vaṅgīsa rapped on the fifth skull as he had on the others, but confessed that he did not know in which of the states of existence the person had been reborn.

Then said the Teacher, "Vaṅgīsa, don't you know?" – "No," replied Vaṅgīsa, "I don't know." – "I know," said the Teacher. Thereupon Vaṅgīsa asked him, "Teach me this charm." "I cannot teach it to one who has not gone forth." Thought the brahmin to himself, "If I only knew this charm I should be the foremost man in all India." Accordingly he dismissed his fellow-brahmins, saying, "Remain right here for a few days; I intend to go forth." And he went forth in the presence of the Teacher, obtained acceptance as a monk, and was thereafter known as Elder Vaṅgīsa.

They gave him as his subject of meditation the thirty-two constituent parts of the body and said to him, "Repeat the preliminary words of the formula." He followed their instructions and repeated the preliminary words of the formula. From time to time the brahmins would ask him, "Have you learned the formula?" and the elder would answer, "Just wait a little! I am learning it." In but a few days he attained arahantship. When the brahmins asked him again, he replied, "Friends, I am now unable to learn it." When the monks heard his reply, they said to the Teacher,

> "Reverend sir, this monk utters what is not true and is guilty of falsehood." The Teacher replied, "Monks, do not say so. Monks, my son now knows all about the passing away and rebirth of beings." So saying, he pronounced the following stanzas:
>
> Who, of beings, knows their death,
> Their being born in every way,
> Detached, well-faring, enlightened too –
> That one I call a brāhmaṇa.
>
> Him whose bourn men do not know,
> Neither devas nor minstrels divine,
> Pollutions destroyed, an arahant –
> That one I call a brāhmaṇa.
>
> ~ 'A Treasury of Buddhist Stories: From the Dhammapada Commentary,' (to verses 419-20), (E.W. Burlingame trans., adapted)

When speaking generally, or in responding to sincere questions rather than counteracting someone's fixed views or claims, the Buddha's words on this subject are still limiting yet take on a slightly more expansive tone.

> 11.4) "Monks, the body of the Tathāgata stands with the link that bound it to becoming (bhava-netti) cut. As long as the body subsists, devas and humans will see him. But at the breaking up of the body and the exhaustion of the life-span, devas and humans will see him no more. Monks, just as when the stalk of a bunch of mangoes has been cut, all the mangoes on it go with it, just so the Tathāgata's link with becoming has been cut. As long as the body subsists, devas and humans will see him. But at the breaking up of the body and the exhaustion of the life-span, devas and humans will see him no more."
>
> ~ D 1.3.73, (Maurice Walshe trans.)

Maurice Walshe's note on "the link that bound it to becoming" explains the phrase as meaning "all that formerly bound him to the cycle of rebirth."

> 11.5) Then the Ven. Phagguna appproached the Blessed One ... and said to him: "Venerable sir, is there any eye by means of which one describing the Buddhas of the past could describe

> them – those who have attained final Nibbāna, cut through proliferation, cut through the rut, exhausted the round, and transcended all suffering? Is there any ear... Is there any mind by means of which one describing the Buddhas of the past could describe them – those who have attained final Nibbāna, cut through proliferation, cut through the rut, exhausted the round, and transcended all suffering?"
> "There is no eye, Phagguna, by means of which one describing the Buddhas of the past could describe them – those who have attained final Nibbāna, cut through proliferation, cut through the rut, exhausted the round, and transcended all suffering. There is no ear... no mind by means of which one describing the Buddhas of the past could describe them – those who have attained final Nibbāna, cut through proliferation, cut through the rut, exhausted the round, and transcended all suffering."
> ~ S 35.83

It can be seen how, in all these dialogues, the Buddha resolutely declines to speak on this issue of 'what happens' when the life of an enlightened being reaches its end.

Moreover, most helpfully, he also points out why. Here are the Buddha's words to a sincere and bright young brahmin student, Upasīva, when he asked about this very question. It is arguably the clearest, as well as the most beautiful expression in the Pali Canon of the Buddha's perspective on this domain.

> 11.6) "Upasīva's Question"
>
> *The Buddha*:
> As a flame overthrown by the force of the wind
> goes to an end
> that cannot be classified,
> so the sage free from naming activity
> goes to an end
> that cannot be classified.
>
> *Upasīva*:
> He who has reached the end:
> Does he not exist,

> or is he for eternity
> free from dis-ease?
> Please, sage, declare this to me
> as this phenomenon has been known by you.
>
> *The Buddha*:
> One who has reached the end
> has no criterion
> by which anyone would say that –
> for him it doesn't exist.
> When all phenomena are done away with,
> all means of speaking
> are done away with as well.
> ~ SN 1074-6, (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

An alternative rendering of the same passage runs as follows:

> 11.7) "It is like a flame struck by a sudden gust of wind," said the Buddha. "In a flash it has gone out and nothing more can be known about it. It is the same with a wise man freed from mental existence: in a flash he has gone out and nothing more can be known about him."
>
> "Please explain this clearly to me, Sir," said Upasīva. "You, a wise man, know precisely the way these things work: has the man disappeared, does he simply not exist, or is he in some state of perpetual well-being?"
>
> "When a person has gone out, then there is nothing by which you can measure him. That by which he can be talked about is no longer there for him; you cannot say that he does not exist. When all ways of being, all phenomena are removed, then all ways of description have also been removed."
> ~ SN 1074-6, (Ven. H. Saddhatissa trans.)

As an appropriate way of closing the present chapter, here is another exchange from the same section of the Sutta Nipāta as the preceding passage, The Way to the Beyond.

11.8) “Mogharāja’s Question”

Mogharāja:
This world, the next world,
the Brahmā world with its devas:
I don’t know how they’re viewed
by the glorious Gotama.
So to the one who has seen
to the far extreme,
I’ve come with a question:
How does one view the world
so as not to be seen
by Death’s king?

The Buddha:
View the world, Mogharāja,
as empty –
always mindful
to have removed any view
about self.

This way one is above & beyond death.
This is how one views the world
so as not to be seen
by Death’s king.
~ SN 1118-9, (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

In the advice that the Buddha gives (“Suññato lokaṃ avekkhassu Mogharāja sadā sato”) he points both to a key method of meditation that is found in the Buddhist tradition (contemplation of emptiness) and to the power that that practice has in freeing the heart. We will look into this in much greater detail in the following chapter, as the final part of our exploration of the terrain of the Island.

12

KNOWING, EMPTINESS AND THE RADIANT MIND

KNOWING

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF TERMS USED IN PALI THAT REFER TO the quality of awareness or knowing; sometimes the particular usage is dependent on the coarseness or refinement of that state, sometimes it is indicating a particular attribute it has, and sometimes the choice of word seems solely stylistic.

As mentioned previously (after §1.11), the Buddha regularly employed a speaking style of setting forth a variety of terms and allowing the meaning to arise from the whole constellation. An obvious case in point comes in the Buddha's first teaching, the Discourse on the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dhamma; herein he describes his awakening to each of the aspects of the Four Noble Truths with the words:

> 12.1) "Vision arose, understanding arose, wisdom arose, knowing arose, light arose…" (Cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.)
> ~ S 56.11

Of these five terms, the middle three are most often used to refer to awareness, particularly in its transcendent mode. Having said this, one should also qualify the usage of the word 'paññā' – in many instances it refers more to a mundane quality of intelligence rather than to anything higher.

When it is conjoined with the adjective lokuttara- (supramundane, transcendent), especially in the ancient Commentaries, it then automatically rises to the same level as 'ñāṇa' and 'vijjā,' together with another term not mentioned in this list, 'aññā' – usually meaning the understanding gained by those who have realized enlightenment.

There are a number of other words and phrases which point to the same area

of mind but which carry various other colourations of meaning; these are such words as sati (mindfulness), sampajañña (clear comprehension), appamāda (heedfulness), paññācakkhu (the eye of wisdom, as at §3.5), yoniso-manasikāra (wise consideration), dhamma-vicaya (investigation of states of experience) and vīmaṃsā (intelligent reviewing).

In the forest tradition of Theravāda Buddhism, particularly as it has been practised in Thailand in the last hundred years or so, a great primacy has been given to the quality of awareness itself – it is seen as the sine qua non of both the path and the goal of the spiritual life.

Certainly, in the monastic life, considerable emphasis is given to purity and precision in ethical discipline, and the austere dhutanga practices are encouraged. For the lay community, a similar stress is placed on the need for moral integrity, as well as the practices of devotion and generosity. In Buddhist training, however, the development and practice of awareness is firmly at the centre of things for those who are intent on liberation. Numerous masters have emphasized repeatedly that it is this very quality, in its role at the core of insight meditation (vipassanā), that frees the heart.

The reason why we have grouped these three qualities – knowing, emptiness and the radiant mind – together for this chapter was first touched on in Chapter 8. The environment of pure awareness is cultivated through a realization of emptiness and then embodies that characteristic as a result of its perfection. Radiance is another of the principal qualities that manifests as that knowing is purified.

These three attributes weave through each other and are mutually reflective and supportive. In a way, they are like the fluidity, wetness and coolness of a glass of water: three qualities that are distinct yet inseparable. It is because of the inseparability of these three, and the continual overlapping of teachings referring to each of them, that they are being investigated together here.

As the reader will discover through this chapter, and as is the general intent of this book, each of the passages lends itself to individual contemplation – contemplation that will slowly reveal many layers of meaning and interrelationship. Sometimes one teaching will seem to confirm another, at other times they might seem to contradict – this is the flavour of Buddha-Dhamma.

It is always up to the individual to take the teachings, apply them, bring them to life and then discover how they mesh via direct knowledge, rather than forcing them to align, in Procrustean conformity, with favoured presuppositions and habit patterns: "Is the mind empty or is it full of light? Is wisdom the light or the emptiness? Both? Neither?" Ajahn Chah once said: "We call the mind empty but actually it's full of wisdom,' maybe that's it!"

It's never a matter of trying to figure it all out, rather we pick up these phrases and chew them over, taste them, digest them and let them energize us by virtue of their own nature.

> 12.2) "One who wishes to reach the Buddha-Dhamma must firstly be one who has faith or confidence as a foundation. We must understand the meaning of Buddha-Dhamma as follows:
> "Buddha: the One-Who-Knows (poo roo), the one who has purity, radiance and peace in the heart.
> "Dhamma: the characteristics of purity, radiance and peace which arise from morality, concentration and wisdom.
> "Therefore, one who is to reach the Buddha-Dhamma is one who cultivates and develops morality, concentration and wisdom within themselves."
> ~ Ajahn Chah, 'Fragments of a Teaching' in 'Food for the Heart' pp 43-44

Buddha-wisdom is the ultimate subject; Dhamma is the ultimate object; the field of their interplay is supremely bright; all these elements are empty of self. Enlightenment, liberation, depends on the recognition of the radical separateness of awareness – 'the one who knows' as Ajahn Chah would phrase it – and the world of the five khandhas. Having said that, it's also crucial to note that the phrase 'the one who knows' ('poo roo' in Thai) is a colloquialism that has different meanings in different contexts. It can be used (at one end of the spectrum) for 'that which cognizes an object,' to (at the other end) 'supramundane wisdom.' Most often it is used in simple concentration instructions, where the meditator separates awareness from the object and then focuses on the awareness. The separate awareness of full awakening is of a different order altogether.

A comparable model that Ajahn Chah often used to illustrate this area is that of the relationship of mindfulness (sati), clear comprehension (sampajañña) and wisdom (paññā) to each other. He would liken these three to the hand, the arm and the body respectively: sati, like the hand, is simply that which picks things up, cognizes them; sampajañña, like the arm that enables the hand to reach for the desired objects and move them around, refers to seeing an object in its context, seeing how the object relates to its surroundings; paññā, like the life source which is the body, is the seeing of things in terms of anicca-dukkha-anattā – uncertainty, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. The hand and the arm have their functions but without the body they are powerless (§5.3).

Training the heart to rest in these various dimensions of knowing, and desisting from entanglement in any aspect of the khandhas, seems to be the central method of many teachers. For example:

> 12.3) The heart knowing the Dhamma
> of ultimate ease
> sees for sure that the khandhas
> are always stressful.
> The Dhamma stays as the Dhamma,
> the khandhas stay as the khandhas, that's all.
> ~ Ajahn Mun, 'The Ballad of Liberation from the Five Khandhas,'
> ll 180-86, (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

> 12.4) When you see that Dhamma, you recover
> from mental unrest.
> The mind then won't be attached to dualities.
> Just this much truth can end the game.
> Knowing not-knowing:
> that's the method for the heart.
> Once we see through inconstancy,
> the mind-source stops creating issues.
> All that remains is the Primal Mind,
> true and unchanging.
> Knowing the mind-source
> brings release from all worry and error.
> If you go out to the mind-ends,
> you're immediately wrong.
> ~ ibid, ll 408-21

The relationship of this quality of awareness to the conditioned realm is embodied in Ajahn Chah's analogy of oil and water, an image he used very often.

> 12.5) "This is the way it is. You detach. You let go. Whenever there is any feeling of clinging, we detach from it, because we know that that very feeling is just as it is. It didn't come along especially to annoy us. We might think that it did, but in truth it just is that way. If we start to think and consider it further, that, too, is just as it is. If we let go, then form is merely form, sound is

> merely sound, odour is merely odour, taste is merely taste, touch is merely touch and the heart is merely the heart. It's similar to oil and water. If you put the two together in a bottle, they won't mix because of the difference of their nature.
>
> "Oil and water are different in the same way that a wise person and an ignorant person are different. The Buddha lived with form, sound, odour, taste, touch and thought. He was an arahant (Enlightened One), so he turned away from rather than toward these things. He turned away and detached little by little since he understood that the heart is just the heart and thought is just thought. He didn't confuse and mix them together.
>
> "The heart is just the heart; thoughts and feelings are just thoughts and feelings. Let things be just as they are! Let form be just form, let sound be just sound, let thought be just thought. Why should we bother to attach to them? If we think and feel in this way, then there is detachment and separateness. Our thoughts and feelings will be on one side and our heart will be on the other. Just like oil and water – they are in the same bottle but they are separate."
>
> ~ Ajahn Chah, 'The Training of the Heart' in 'Food for the Heart,' pp 157-8 (adapted)

Upāsikā Kee Nanayon was another of great teachers of the 20th century in Thailand. She was distinguished not only by her incisive wisdom but also by her uncompromising approach to Dhamma practice and teaching. She describes the quality of awareness as:

> 12.6) An inward-staying
> unentangled knowing,
> All outward-going knowing
> cast aside.
>
> ~ Upāsikā Kee Nanayon, 'An Unentangled Knowing,' p 33, (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

In the employment of such terms as 'the one who knows,' it is important to understand that this is a colloquial usage and in no sense is some kind of 'true self' or 'super-entity' implied – it's merely a convenient figure of speech. If we start looking for 'who' it is that is aware we rapidly end up in the kind of tangle described at §5.13.

When we speak or think about the quality of awareness there is also a subtle danger of the mind trying to cast it into the form of some kind of immaterial thing or process. The word ‘awareness’ is an abstract noun, and we get so used to relating to ordinary objects through conceptualizing about them that we allow the habit to overflow; thus we can end up conceiving awareness in the same way (cf §5.15). The heart can be aware but to try to make awareness an object, in the same way that we would a tree or a thought, is a frustrating process. Ajahn Chah’s most common phrase in warning against this was to say:

> 12.7) “You’re riding on a horse and asking, ‘Where’s the horse?’”
> ~ Ajahn Chah, in ‘Venerable Father,’ by Paul Breiter, p 154

Or Ajahn Sumedho’s favorite:

> 12.8) “Just like the question ‘Can you see your own eyes?’ Nobody can see their own eyes. I can see your eyes but I can’t see my eyes. I’m sitting right here, I’ve got two eyes and I can’t see them. But you can see my eyes. But there’s no need for me to see my eyes because I can see! It’s ridiculous, isn’t it? If I started saying ‘Why can’t I see my own eyes?’ you’d think ‘Ajahn Sumedho’s really weird, isn’t he!’ Looking in a mirror you can see a reflection, but that’s not your eyes, it’s a reflection of your eyes. There’s no way that I’ve been able to look and see my own eyes, but then it’s not necessary to see your own eyes. It’s not necessary to know who it is that knows – because there’s knowing.”
> ~ Ajahn Sumedho, ‘What is the Citta?,’ ‘Forest Sangha Newsletter,’ Oct ’88

This very type of error is the reason why it’s perhaps wiser to use a term such as ‘knowing’ instead of ‘transcendent wisdom’ or ‘awareness.’ As a gerund it is a ‘verb-noun,’ thus lending to it a more accurate quality of immanence, activity and non-thingness. The process of Awakening not only breaks down subject/object relationships, as we have already discussed, it also breaks down the very formulation of ‘things,’ in order to speak more accurately of ‘events being known in consciousness.’ Some years ago Buckminster Fuller published a book entitled ‘I Seem to Be a Verb’; more recently, and more expansively, Rabbi David Cooper

published ‘God is a Verb’ – both of these being attempts to counteract the floodtide of formulation of reality as ‘things’ that the untrained, conditioned mind is prone to generating.

EMPTINESS

We come now to the quality of emptiness. Firstly, it is of some significance to note that, although the adjectival noun ‘suññatā,’ ‘emptiness,’ is used in the Theravāda scriptures, it is far outweighed in representation there by its humble cousin, the adjective ‘suñña,’ ‘empty.’ In later, Northern Buddhist traditions śūnyatā took on not only a central position in the teachings on liberation (e.g. in the Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtras, the Heart Sūtra and the Vajra Sūtra) and the Middle Way (as in Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka philosophy, uniting emptiness and causality) but it also took on the attributes of some kind of quasi-mystical substance or realm – not intentionally or doctrinally even, but more through a subtle and unconscious reification. It became a something that is a nothing: that then was worshipped and deified as a universal panacea.

This is not to say that all such teachings on emptiness are by any means false or useless, not at all; it is just to say that, like any verbal formulation of Dhamma, if grasped wrongly they can obstruct rather than aid progress on the path. If the concept of emptiness is understood and used as a skilful means (upāya) it is clearly seen that it could not be any kind of a thing-in-itself; any tendency to incline the attitude in that direction would thus be seen as falling wide of the mark.

> 12.9) If a person were to say that suññatā is a material element, his or her friends would die laughing. Some people would say that it is an immaterial or formless element, and here the Noble Ones (ariya) would die laughing. Voidness is neither a material nor an immaterial element, but is a third kind of element that lies beyond the ken of ordinary people. The Buddha called it “quenching element” or “cessation element” (nirodha-dhātu). The words “material element” (vatthu-dhātu) or “form element” (rūpa-dhātu) refer to materiality in visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes, or tactile objects. “Formless element” (arūpa-dhātu) refers to the mind and heart, to mental processes, and to the thoughts and experiences that arise in the mind. There is only one kind of

> element not included in these two categories, an element that is the complete antithesis and annihilation of them all. Consequently, the Buddha sometimes called it "coolness element" (Nibbāna-dhātu), sometimes "quenching element" (nirodha-dhātu), and sometimes "deathless element" (amata-dhātu).
> ~ Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 'Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree,' pp 51-2

In the Pali scriptures 'suñña' simply means 'empty.' It describes the quality of absence – an absence contained within a particular defining form, rather than some kind of absolute value. Every space has its poetics: this personality is empty of self, this glass is empty of water, this room is empty of people – there is a definite voidness in some respects but it is also 'shaped' by its context. The pair of silences during the opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony are just silence but the particular poetry of those silences is shaped by the notes before and after.

Without the glass there would not be any emptiness; without the other musical notes those moments would not be silent – that is to say, the emptiness only exists in relationship to its vessel, whatever that may be: a personality, a glass, a room, a musical phrase; it's just a way of speaking about form and space using relative language.

Thus from the Theravāda point of view, the concept of emptiness is quite prosaic. It lacks the intrinsic mystical quality imputed to it in some of the Northern Buddhist scriptures. However, it becomes more meaningful in terms of liberation as it is almost always used in the context of "empty of self and the property of a self." If that absence is being apprehended then the heart is certainly inclining to Awakening.

Phrases such as "enters into the signless concentration of mind (animitta-cetosamādhi)," "I often abide in emptiness (suññatā-vihāra)" are probably the kind of sources for the later drifting of the meaning of emptiness. Originally these pointed to the realization of Nibbāna through the contemplation of and concentration on qualities such as impermanence and selflessness, and were not intended to be regarded as referring to some kind of mystical realm. Such drift is an almost inevitable product of the flow of myth-making that we humans tend to generate; however, the wise will look into this and not be drawn along with the current. Here are some of the central teachings on emptiness to be found in the Pali Canon. First of all here is a passage where the Buddha is explicitly using the term 'empty' to mean 'empty of self.'

> 12.10) Then the Ven. Ānanda approached the Blessed One... and said to him: "Venerable sir, it is said, 'The world is empty, the world is empty.' In what way, Venerable sir, is it said, 'The world is empty, the world is empty?'"
> "It is because it is empty of self and what belongs to a self that 'The world is empty' is said, Ānanda. And what is empty of self and what belongs to a self? The eye is empty of self and what belongs to a self... forms... eye-consciousness... eye-contact... any feeling born of eye-contact, whether pleasant, painful or neutral is empty of self and what belongs to a self. The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body... The mind is empty of self and what belongs to a self... mental objects... mind-consciousness... mind-contact... any feeling born of mind-contact whether pleasant, painful or neutral is empty of self and what belongs to a self."
> ~ S 35.85

The next sutta employs the word 'suñña' in the same way, as well as having many useful things to say about the various forms of liberation. It is also significant in that it is one of the very rare suttas in the Pali Canon where a layperson gives teachings to a monastic.

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> 12.11) On one occasion the Venerable Godatta was dwelling at Macchikāsaṇḍa in the Wild Mango Grove. Then Citta the householder approached the Venerable Godatta, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. The Venerable Godatta then said to him as he was sitting to one side:
> "Householder, the measureless liberation of mind, the liberation of mind by nothingness, the liberation of mind by emptiness, and the signless liberation of mind: are these things different in meaning and also different in phrasing, or are they one in meaning and different only in phrasing?"
> "There is a method, venerable sir, by which these things are different in meaning and also different in phrasing, and there is a method by which they are one in meaning and different only in phrasing.
> "And what, venerable sir, is the method by which these things are different in meaning and also different in phrasing? Here a

bhikkhu dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with lovingkindness, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with lovingkindness, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without ill will. He dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion... with a mind imbued with altruistic joy... with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with equanimity, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without ill will. This is called the measureless liberation of mind (appamāṇā cetovimutti).

"And what, venerable sir, is the liberation of mind by nothingness? Here, by completely transcending the base of the infinity of consciousness, aware that 'there is nothing,' a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the base of nothingness. This is called the liberation of mind by nothingness (ākiñcaññā cetovimutti).

"And what, venerable sir, is the liberation of mind by emptiness? Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty hut, reflects thus: 'Empty is this of self or of what belongs to self.' This is called the liberation of mind by emptiness (suññatā cetovimutti).

"And what, venerable sir, is the signless liberation of mind? Here, with non-attention to all signs, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the signless concentration of mind. This is called the signless liberation of mind (animittā cetovimutti).

"This, venerable sir, is the method by which these things are different in meaning and also different in phrasing. And what, venerable sir, is the method by which these things are one in meaning and different only in phrasing?

"Passion, venerable sir, is a maker of measurement, hatred is a maker of measurement, delusion is a maker of measurement. For a bhikkhu whose heart is completely pure, these have been abandoned, cut off at the root, made like palm stumps, obliterated so that they are no more subject to future arising. To whatever extent there are measureless liberations of mind, the

> unshakeable liberation of mind is declared the chief among them. Now that unshakeable liberation of mind is empty of greed, empty of hatred, empty of delusion.
> "Passion, venerable sir, is a something, hatred is a something, delusion is a something. For a bhikkhu whose heart is completely pure, these have been abandoned, cut off at the root, made like palm stumps, obliterated so that they are no more subject to future arising. To whatever extent there are liberations of mind by nothingness, the unshakeable liberation of mind is declared the chief among them. Now that unshakeable liberation of mind is empty of greed, empty of hatred, empty of delusion.
> "Passion, venerable sir, is a maker of signs, hatred is a maker of signs, delusion is a maker of signs. For a bhikkhu whose heart is completely pure, these have been abandoned, cut off at the root, made like palm stumps, obliterated so that they are no more subject to future arising. To whatever extent there are signless liberations of mind, the unshakeable liberation of mind is declared the chief among them. Now that unshakeable liberation of mind is empty of greed, empty of hatred, empty of delusion.
> "This, venerable sir, is the method by which these things are one in meaning and different only in phrasing."
> "It is a gain for you, householder, it is a great gain for you, that you have the eye of wisdom that ranges over the deep Word of the Buddha."
> ~ S 41.7

In this interpretation, the measureless liberation of mind is via the four divine abidings; liberation of mind by nothingness refers to the third level of formless jhāna; the liberation of mind by emptiness is concentration based on insight into the selfless nature of phenomena. The signless liberation of mind is harder to pinpoint in terms of a familiar doctrinal category; however, its characteristics seem to align it with nippapañca (freedom from conceptual proliferation) and the quality of Atammayatā – the non-fabricating faculty of the mind. It is that which is restraining the tendency to conceive the world in terms of fixed and separate names, forms and things, and which leads from there to liberation. The ancient commentary describes it as being supramundane with Nibbāna as its object. It is thus identified with arahantship; the first three, although all exalted states, all pertain to the mundane level.

Probably the most familiar statement in the scriptures concerning signless concentration, as well as its most poignant instance, was spoken by the Buddha a few months before the Parinibbāna.

> 12.12) "Ānanda, I am now old, worn out, venerable, one who has traversed life's path, I have reached the term of life, which is eighty. Just as an old cart is made to go by being held together with straps, so the Tathāgata's body is kept going by being strapped up. It is only when the Tathāgata withdraws his attention from outward signs, and by the cessation of certain feelings, enters into the signless concentration of mind, that his body knows comfort."
> ~ D 16.2.25

A similar, if not identical, grouping of types of liberation (vimokkhā) is to be found in the Visuddhimagga, relating the manner in which each of the familiar Three Characteristics should be handled and the type of release resulting from that effort.

> 12.13) With great resolution there is the contemplation of impermanence; this leads to liberation through signlessness (animitta-vimokkhā).
> With great tranquility there is the contemplation of unsatisfactoriness; this leads to liberation through desirelessness (appaṇihita-vimokkhā).
> With great wisdom there is the contemplation of selflessness; this leads to liberation through emptiness (suññata-vimokkhā).
> ~ Vsm 21.70

In contrast to the previous two discourses, in this next one (which arguably forms the Buddha's most extensive teaching on emptiness in the Pali Canon) the term is used in a somewhat different way, forming a 'nest' of contemplations of ever-increasing subtlety, leading to the stopping of the outflows (āsava) and liberation.

> 12.14) 'The Shorter Discourse on Emptiness'
> Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatthi in the Eastern Park, in the Palace of Migāra's Mother.

Then, when it was evening, the venerable Ānanda rose from meditation, went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and said to the Blessed One:
"Venerable sir, on one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Sakyan country at a town of the Sakyans named Nagaraka. There, venerable sir, I heard and learned this from the Blessed One's own lips: 'Now, Ānanda, I often abide in emptiness (suññatā-vihāra).' Did I hear that correctly, venerable sir, did I learn that correctly, attend to that correctly, remember that correctly?"
"Certainly, Ānanda, you heard that correctly, learned that correctly, attended to that correctly, remembered that correctly. As formerly, Ānanda, so now too I often abide in emptiness.
"Ānanda, just as this Palace of Migāra's Mother is empty of elephants, cattle, horses and mares, empty of gold and silver, empty of the assembly of men and women, and there is present only this non-emptiness, namely, the singleness dependent on the Sangha of bhikkhus; so too, a bhikkhu – not attending to the perception of village, not attending to the perception of people – attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of forest. His mind enters into that perception of forest and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of village, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of people, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of forest.'… Thus he regards it as empty of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: 'This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this is his genuine, undistorted, pure entry into emptiness.
"Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu – not attending to the perception of people, not attending to the perception of forest – attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of earth. His mind enters into that perception of earth and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision. Just as a bull's hide becomes free from folds when fully stretched with a hundred pegs; so too, a bhikkhu – not attending to any of the ridges and hollows of this earth, to the rivers and ravines, the tracts of stumps and thorns, the mountains

> and uneven places – attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of earth. His mind enters into that perception of earth and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of people, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of forest, those are not present here. There is present here only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of earth.' He understands: 'This field of perception is empty of the perception of people; this field of perception is empty of the perception of forest. There is present only this non-emptiness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of earth.' Thus he regards it as empty of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: 'This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this too is his genuine, undistorted, pure entry into emptiness.
>
> "Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu – not attending to the perception of forest not attending to the perception of earth – attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of infinite space. His mind enters into that perception of the base of infinite space and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of forest, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of earth, those are not present here. There is present here only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of infinite space.' He understands: 'This field of perception is empty of the perception of forest; this field of perception is empty of the perception of earth. There is present only this non-emptiness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of infinite space.' Thus he regards it as empty of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: 'This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this too is his genuine, undistorted, pure entry into emptiness.

So too with the bases of infinite consciousness, nothingness and neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

"Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu... not attending to the perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception – attends to the singleness dependent on the signless concentration of mind (animitta-cetosamādhi). His mind enters into that signless concentration of mind and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of the base of nothingness, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, those are not present here. There is present here only this amount of disturbance, namely, that connected with the six sense bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life.' He understands: 'This field of perception is empty of the perception of the base of nothingness; this field of perception is empty of the perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. There is present only this non-emptiness, namely, that connected with the six sense bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life.' Thus he regards it as empty of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: 'This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this too is his genuine, undistorted, pure entry into emptiness.

"Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu... attends to the singleness dependent on the signless concentration of mind. His mind enters into that signless concentration of mind and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision. He understands thus: 'This signless concentration of mind is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' When he knows and sees thus, his heart is liberated from the outflow of sensual desire, from the outflow of becoming, and from the outflow of ignorance. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: 'It is liberated.' He understands: 'Birth is ended, the holy life has been lived out, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming into any state of being.'

"He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the outflow of sensual desire, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the outflow of becoming, those are not present here;

> whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the outflow of ignorance, those are not present here. There is present here only this amount of disturbance, namely, that connected with the six sense bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life.' He understands: 'This field of perception is empty of the outflow of sensual desire; this field of perception is empty of the outflow of becoming; this field of perception is empty of the outflow of ignorance. There is present only this non-emptiness, namely, that connected with the six sense bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life.' Thus he regards it as empty of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: 'This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this is his genuine, undistorted pure entry into emptiness, supreme and unsurpassed.
>
> "Ānanda, whatever samaṇas and brahmins in the past… future… [or] present enter upon and abide in pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness, all enter upon and abide in this same, pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness. Therefore, Ānanda, you should train thus: 'We will enter upon and abide in pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness.'"
>
> That is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Ānanda was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.
>
> ~ M 121

This is an extensive teaching, with many aspects of meditation practice subsumed within it. As the aim of this section of the book is principally to explore some of the terrain and to map out the main characteristics of Nibbāna, we will leave it to the final section on Cultivation and Fruition to describe the practical side of developing methods of meditation akin to that described here.

Even though emptiness was not the most frequent subject of the Buddha's teachings, it was plainly one that he saw to be of great importance. The following passages indicate the profound and essential quality that the Buddha saw in the development of the insight into emptiness, and the need to encourage its realization in his disciples, both monastic and lay.

> 12.15) "Bhikkhus, once in the past the Dasārahas had a kettle drum called the Summoner. When the Summoner became cracked, the Dasārahas inserted another peg. Eventually the time

came when the Summoner's original drumhead had disappeared and only a collection of pegs remained.

"So too, bhikkhus, the same thing will happen with the bhikkhus in the future. When those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness, are being recited, they will not be eager to listen to them, nor lend an ear to them, nor apply their minds to understand them; and they will not think those teachings should be studied and mastered. But when those discourses that are mere poetry composed by poets, beautiful in words and phrases, created by outsiders, spoken by [their] disciples, are being recited, they will be eager to listen to them, will lend an ear to them, will apply their minds to understand them; and they will think those teachings should be studied and mastered. In this way, bhikkhus, those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness, will disappear.

"Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: 'When those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness, are being recited, we will be eager to listen to them, will lend an ear to them, will apply our minds to understand them; and we will think those teachings should be studied and mastered.' Thus should you train yourselves."

~ S 20.7, (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

12.16) On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Bārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana. Then the lay follower Dhammadinna, together with five hundred lay followers, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. Sitting to one side, the lay follower Dhammadinna then said to the Blessed One: "Let the Blessed One, venerable sir, exhort us and instruct us in a way that may lead to our welfare and happiness for a long time."

"Therefore, Dhammadinna, you should train yourselves thus: 'From time to time we will enter and dwell upon those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness.' It is in such a

> way that you should train yourselves."
> "Venerable sir, it is not easy for us – dwelling in a home crowded with children, enjoying Kāsian sandalwood, wearing garlands, scents, and cosmetics, receiving gold and silver – from time to time to enter and dwell upon those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness. As we are established in the five training rules, let the Blessed One teach us the Dhamma further."
> "Therefore, Dhammadinna, you should train yourselves thus: 'We will possess confirmed confidence in the Buddha... in the Dhamma... in the Sangha.... We will possess the virtues dear to the noble ones, unbroken... leading to concentration.' It is in such a way that you should train yourselves."
> "Venerable sir, as to these four factors of stream-entry taught by the Blessed One, these things exist in us, and we live in conformity with those things. For, venerable sir, we possess confirmed confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. We possess the virtues dear to the noble ones, unbroken... leading to concentration."
> "It is a gain for you, Dhammadinna! It is well gained by you, Dhammadinna! You have declared the fruit of stream-entry."
> ~ S 55.53, (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

One of the most common ways in which the Buddha employed the concept of emptiness in his expositions was in reference to wise consideration of the five khandhas.

> 12.17) On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Ayojjhā on the bank of the river Ganges. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus:
> "Bhikkhus, suppose that this river Ganges was carrying along a great lump of foam. A person with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to them to be empty, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a lump of foam? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of form there is, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and

it would appear to him to be empty, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in form?

"Suppose, bhikkhus, that in the autumn, when it is raining and big raindrops are falling, a water bubble arises and bursts on the surface of the water. A person with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to them to be empty, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a waterbubble? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of feeling there is... a bhikkhu... investigates it, and it would appear to him to be empty, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in feeling?

"Suppose, bhikkhus, that in the last month of the hot season, at high noon, a shimmering mirage appears. A person with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to them to be empty, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a mirage? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of perception there is... a bhikkhu... investigates it, and it would appear to him to be empty, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in perception?

"Suppose, bhikkhus, that a person needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, would take a sharp axe and enter a forest. There they would see the trunk of a large plantain tree, straight, fresh, without a fruit-bud core. They would cut it down at the root, cut off the crown, and unroll the coil. As they unrolled the coil, they would not find even softwood, let alone heartwood. A person with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to them to be empty, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in the trunk of a plantain tree? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of mental formations there are... a bhikkhu... investigates them, and they would appear to him to be empty, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in mental formations?

"Suppose, bhikkhus, that a conjurer or a conjurer's apprentice would display a magical illusion at a crossroads. A person with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to them to be empty, hollow, insubstantial.For what substance could there be in a magical illusion? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of consciousness there is... a

> bhikkhu... investigates it, and it would appear to him to be empty, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in consciousness?
> "Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the wise noble disciple experiences disenchantment towards form, disenchantment towards feeling, disenchantment towards perception, disenchantment towards mental formations, disenchantment towards consciousness. Experiencing disenchantment, they become dispassionate. Through dispassion the heart is liberated. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: 'It is liberated.' They understand: 'Birth is ended, the holy life has been lived out, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming into any state of being.'"
> This is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Fortunate One, the Teacher, further said this:
> "Form is like a lump of foam,
> feeling a water bubble;
>
> perception is just a mirage,
> volitions like a plantain,
>
> consciousness, a magic trick –
> so says the Kinsman of the Sun.
>
> However one may ponder it
> or carefully inquire,
>
> all appears both void and vacant
> when it's seen in truth."
> ~ S 22.95

Over and over again, and throughout the Buddhist world, this collection of images appears as a vivid metphor for the realm of mind and body.

> 12.18) Knowing the body as false as foam,
> knowing it as a hazy mirage,
> knowing the barb in Māra's flowers –
> thus the wise elude Death's Lord.
> ~ Dhp 46

> 12.19) They who look upon the world
> as unstable, insubstantial,
> as bubble, mirage and illusion –
> they're the ones Death cannot find.
> ~ Dhp 170

These verses also bring to mind the Buddha's advice to Mogharāja, quoted at §11.8. These simple instructions point out, again and again, that it is through wise contemplation and investigation of all experience, and seeing its essential emptiness, that the heart is released from its bondage to the cycles of death and rebirth. These teachings are of such universality and potency that they are amongst those most widely studied and practised throughout the Buddhist tradition. For example:

> 12.20) "Subhūti, someone might fill measureless asaṃkhyeyas of world systems with the seven precious gems and give them as a gift. But if a good man, or a good woman, who has resolved their heart on Bodhi were to take from this sūtra even as few as four lines of verse and receive, hold, read, recite and extensively explain them for others, their blessings would surpass the others.
> "How should it be explained to others? With no grasping at marks: thus, thus, unmoving. And why?
> "All conditioned dharmas
> are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows,
> like dewdrops and a lightning flash:
> contemplate them thus."
> ~ Vajra Sūtra, Ch. 32

Along with the similarity of imagery, it is also interesting to note that the above scripture of the Northern tradition employs a method of comparison very close to that found in many Pali suttas. For example, in the Velāma Sutta (A 9.20), the Buddha describes a previous existence wherein he made an offering of incalculable richness. However (after a long list of increasingly beneficial actions), he states that it would be more fruitful than all the actions described there: "to sustain the insight into impermanence for merely as long as a finger-snap," thus, as in the Vajra Sūtra quotation, clearly delineating wisdom as the most precious commodity of all.

Of all the teachings on emptiness to be found in the Northern tradition, probably the most ubiquitous is the Heart Sūtra. It is recited daily in Buddhist communities from Ladakh to Hokkaido, from Taiwan to Lake Baikhal, not to mention at Buddhist monasteries and centers throughout the Western world. It is considered to embody the essence of the wisdom teachings of the Buddha. It, too, is structured around the insight into the true nature of the five khandhas.

> 12.21) When Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was practising the profound prajñā pāramitā, he illuminated the five skandhas and saw that they were all empty, and he crossed beyond all suffering and difficulty.
>
> "Śāriputra, form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form. So too are feeling, cognition, formations and consciousness.
>
> "Śāriputra, all dharmas are empty of characteristics. They are not produced, not destroyed, not defiled, not pure, and they neither increase nor diminish.
>
> "Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, feeling, cognition, formations or consciousness; no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind; no sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch or dharmas; no field of the eyes, up to and including no field of mind-consciousness; and no ignorance or ending of ignorance, up to and including no old age and death, or ending of old age and death. There is no suffering, no origination, no extinction and no Way, and no understanding and no attaining.
>
> "Because nothing is attained, the Bodhisattva, through reliance on prajñā pāramitā is unimpeded in his mind. Because there is no impediment, he is not afraid and he leaves distorted dream-thinking far behind. Ultimately Nirvāṇa!
>
> "All Buddhas of the three periods of time attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi through reliance on prajñā pāramitā.
>
> "Therefore know that prajñā pāramitā is a great spiritual mantra, a great bright mantra, a supreme mantra, an unequalled mantra. It can remove all suffering; it is genuine and not false. That is why the mantra of prajñā pāramitā was spoken. Recite it like this: gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svāhā!"
>
> ~ 'The Heart of Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra,' p 1 (BTTS trans.)

RADIANCE

Finally in this chapter we will take a brief look at the quality of 'radiance.'

> 12.22) "Bhikkhus, there are these four radiances – what are the four? The radiance of the moon, the radiance of the sun, the radiance of fire, the radiance of wisdom (paññāpabhā)... Bhikkhus, among these four, the radiance of wisdom is indeed the most excellent."
> ~ A 4.142

> 12.23) "Wisdom is the source of light in the world."
> ~ S 1.80

Along with the 'anidassana-viññāṇa' teachings already quoted, many of the Thai forest masters also regularly refer to the "pabhassara citta" mentioned in a pair of suttas in the Anguttara Nikāya:

> 12.24) "Bhikkhus, this mind is radiant, but it doesn't show its radiance because passing defilements come and obscure it. (Pabhassaramidaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ, tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ). The unwise, ordinary person does not understand this as it is, therefore there is no mind development in the unwise, ordinary person.
> "Bhikkhus, this mind is radiant, it shows its radiance when it is unobscured by passing defilements. The wise, noble disciple understands this as it is, therefore there is mind development in the wise, noble disciple."
> ~ A 1.61 & .62

> 12.25) "The mind is something more radiant than anything else can be, but because counterfeits – passing defilements – come and obscure it, it loses its radiance, like the sun when obscured by clouds. Don't go thinking that the sun goes after the clouds. Instead, the clouds come drifting along and obscure the sun.
> "So meditators, when they know in this manner, should do away with these counterfeits by analyzing them shrewdly... When they develop the mind to the stage of the primal mind, this will mean that all counterfeits are destroyed, or rather, counterfeit things

won't be able to reach into the primal mind, because the bridge making the connection will have been destroyed. Even though the mind may then still have to come into contact with the preoccupations of the world, its contact will be like that of a bead of water rolling over a lotus leaf."
~ Ven. Ajahn Mun, 'A Heart Released,' p 23

12.26) "If we train this restless mind of ours to experience the tranquillity of one-pointedness, we will see that the one-pointed mind exists separately from the defilements such as anger and so on. The mind and the defilements are not identical. If they were, purification of mind would be impossible. The mind forges imaginings that harness the defilements to itself, and then becomes unsure as to exactly what is the mind and what is defilement.
"The Buddha taught ['Pabhassaramidaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ, tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ.'] The mind is unceasingly radiant; defilements are separate entities that enter into it." This saying shows that his teaching on the matter is in fact clear. For the world to be the world, every one of its constituent parts must be present: its existence depends on them. The only thing that stands by itself is Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha. One who considers Dhamma to be manifold or composite has not yet penetrated it thoroughly. Water is in its natural state a pure, transparent fluid, but if dyestuff is added to it, it will change colour accordingly: if red dye is added it will turn red; if black dye, black. But even though water may change its colour in accordance with substances introduced into it, it does not forsake its innate purity and colourlessness. If a wise person is able to distil all the coloured water, it will resume its natural state. The dyestuff can only cause variation in outer appearance...
"The heart is that which lies at the centre of things, and is also formless. It is simple awareness devoid of movement to and fro, of past and future, within and without, merit and harm. Wherever the centre of a thing lies, there lies its heart, for the word 'heart' means centrality."
~ Ajahn Thate, 'Only the World Ends,' pp 47-9 (Jayasāro Bhikkhu trans.)

Following these two passages it seems very fitting to include another set of reflections on the same Sutta. This teaching is from Ajahn Mahā Boowa – bearing in mind also that he is the devoted disciple of Ven. Ajahn Mun and would not dream of contradicting his teacher.

> 12.27) 'The Radiant Mind Is Unawareness'
> We'll see – when the mind is cleansed so that it is fully pure and nothing can become involved with it – that no fear appears in the mind at all. Fear doesn't appear. Courage doesn't appear. All that appears is its own nature by itself, just its own timeless nature. That's all. This is the genuine mind. 'Genuine mind' here refers only to the purity or the 'sa upādisesa-nibbāna' of the arahants. Nothing else can be called the 'genuine mind' without reservations or hesitations. I, for one, would feel embarrassed to use the term for anything else at all.
> The 'original mind' means the original mind of the round in which the mind finds itself spinning around and about, as in the Buddha's saying, "Monks, the original mind is radiant" – notice that – "but because of the admixture of defilements" or "because of the defilements which come passing through, it becomes darkened."
> The original mind here refers to the origin of conventional realities, not to the origin of purity. The Buddha uses the term 'pabhassaraṃ' – 'pabhassaramidaṃ cittaṃ bhikkhave' – which means radiant. It doesn't mean pure. The way he puts it is absolutely right. There is no way you can fault it. Had he said that the original mind is pure, you could immediately take issue: "If the mind is pure, why is it born? Those who have purified their minds are never reborn. If the mind is already pure, why purify it?" Right here is where you could take issue. What reason would there be to purify it? If the mind is radiant, you can purify it because its radiance is unawareness [avijjā] incarnate, and nothing else. Meditators will see clearly for themselves the moment the mind passes from radiance to mental release: Radiance will no longer appear. Right here is the point where meditators clearly know this, and it's the point that lets them argue – because the truth has to be found true in the individual heart. Once a person knows, he or she can't help but speak with

full assurance.
~ Ajahn Mahā Boowa, 'Straight From the Heart,' pp 139-40, (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

12.28) Now, when the mind has investigated time and again, ceaselessly, relentlessly, it will develop expertise in affairs of the khandhas. The physical khandha will be the first to be relinquished through discernment [paññā]. In the beginning stage of the investigation, discernment will see through physical khandha before seeing through the others, and be able to let it go. From there, the mind will gradually be able to let go of vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra and viññāṇa at the same time.
To put the matter simply, once discernment sees through them, it lets go. If it has yet to see through them, it holds on. Once we see through them with discernment, we let them go – let them go completely – because we see they are simply ripplings in the mind – blip, blip, blip – without any substance at all. A good thought appears and vanishes. A bad thought appears and vanishes. Whatever kind of thought appears, it's simply a formation and as such it vanishes. If a hundred formations appear, all hundred of them vanish. There is no permanence to them substantial enough for us to trust.
So then. What is it that keeps supplying us with these things or keeps forcing them out on us? What is it that keeps forcing this thing and that out to fool us? This is where we come to what the Buddha calls the pabhassara-citta: the original, radiant mind. "But monks, because of the admixture of defilement," or "because of the defilements that come passing through" – from sights, sound, smells, tastes, tactile sensations; from rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra and viññāṇa, that our labels and assumptions haul in to burn us – "the mind becomes defiled." It's defiled with just these very things.
Thus investigation is for the sake of removing these things so as to reveal the mind through clear discernment. We can then see that as long as the mind is at the stage where it hasn't ventured out to become engaged in any object – in as much as its instruments, the senses, are still weak and undeveloped – it is quiet and radiant, as in the saying, "The original mind is the radiant mind." But this is the original mind of the round of

rebirth – for example, the mind of a newborn child whose activities are still too undeveloped to take any objects on fully. It's not the original mind freed from the cycle and fully pure.

So while we investigate around us stage by stage, the symptoms of defilement that used to run all over the place will be gathered into this single point, becoming a radiance within the mind. And this radiance: Even the tools of super-mindfulness and super-discernment will have to fall for it when they first meet with it, because it's something we have never seen before, never met before, from the beginning of our practice or from the day of our birth. We thus become awed and amazed. It seems for the moment that nothing can compare to it in magnificence.

And why shouldn't it be magnificent? It has been the king of the round of rebirth in all three worlds – the world of sensuality, the world of form and the world of formlessness – since way back when, for countless aeons. It's the one who has wielded power over the mind and ruled the mind all along. As long as the mind doesn't possess the mindfulness and discernment to pull itself out from under this power, how can it not be magnificent? This is why it has been able to drive the mind into experiencing birth on various levels without limit, in dependence on the fruits of the different actions it has performed under the orders of the ephemeral defilements. The fact that living beings wander and stray, taking birth and dying unceasingly, is because this nature leads them to do so.

This being the case, we have to investigate it so as to see it plainly. Actually, radiance and defilement are two sides of the same coin, because they are both conventional realities. The radiance that comes from the convergence of the various defilements will form a point, a center, so that we can clearly perceive that, "This is the center of the radiance." When any defilement appears, in correspondence with that state or level of the mind, a very refined stress will arise in the center we call radiant. Thus radiance, defilement, and stress – all three – are companions. They go together.

For this reason, the mind possessing radiance must worry over it, guard it, protect it, maintain it, for fear that something may come to disturb it, jar it, obscure its radiance. Even the most refined adulteration is still an affair of defilement, about which

we as meditators should not be complacent. We must investigate it with unflagging discernment. In order to cut through the burdens of your concerns once and for all, you should ask yourself, "What is this radiance?" Fix your attention on it until you know. There's no need to fear that once this radiance is destroyed, the 'real you' will be destroyed with it. Focus your investigation right at that center to see clearly that this radiance has the characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self just like all the other phenomena you have already examined. It's not different in any way, aside from the difference in its subtlety. Thus nothing should be taken for granted. If anything has the nature of conventional reality, let discernment slash away at it. Focus right down on the mind itself. All the really counterfeit things lie in the mind. This radiance is the ultimate counterfeit and at that moment it's the most conspicuous point. You hardly want to touch it at all, because you love it and cherish it more than anything else. In the entire body there is nothing more outstanding than this radiance, which is why you are amazed at it, love it, cherish it, dawdle over it, want nothing to touch it. But it's the enemy king: unawareness.

Have you ever seen it? If you haven't, then when you reach this stage in your practice, you'll fall for it of your own accord. And then you'll know it of your own accord – no one will have to tell you – when mindfulness and discernment are ready. It's called avijjā – unawareness. Right here is the true unawareness. Nothing else is true unawareness. Don't go imagining avijjā as a tiger, a leopard, a demon or a beast. Actually, it's the most beautiful, most alluring Miss Universe the world has ever seen. Genuine unawareness is very different from what we expect it to be.

When we reach genuine unawareness, we don't know what unawareness is, and so we get stuck right there. If there is no one to advise us, no one to suggest an approach, we are sure to be stuck there a long time before we can understand and work ourselves free. But if there is someone to suggest an approach, we can begin to understand it and strike right at that center, without trusting it, by investigating it in the same way we have dealt with all other phenomena.

Once we've investigated it with sharp discernment until we

know it clearly, this phenomenon will dissolve away in a completely unexpected way. At the same time, you could call it Awakening, or closing down the cemeteries of the round of rebirth, the round of the mind, under the shade of the Bodhi tree. Once this phenomenon has dissolved away, something even more amazing which has been concealed by unawareness will be revealed in all its fullness.

This is what is said to be like the quaking of the cosmos within the heart. This is a very crucial mental moment: when the heart breaks away from conventions. This moment, when release and conventional reality break away from each other, is more awesome than can be expressed. The phrase, "the path of arahantship giving way to the fruition of arahantship" refers to precisely this mental moment, the moment in which unawareness vanishes. As we are taught, when the path is fully developed, it steps onward to the fruition of arahantship, which is the Dhamma – the mind – at its most complete. From that moment on, there are no more problems.

The phrase, 'the one nibbāna,' is fully realized in this heart in the moment unawareness is dissolving. We are taught that this is the moment when the path and the fruition – which are a pair – come together and meet. If we were to make a comparison with climbing the stairs to a house, one foot is on the last step, the other foot is on the floor of the house. We haven't yet reached the house with both feet. When both feet are on the floor of the house, we've 'reached the house.' As for the mind, it is said to reach the Dhamma or to attain the ultimate Dhamma, and from the moment of attainment, it's called 'the one nibbāna.'

In other words, the mind is completely free. It displays no further activity for the removal of defilement. This is called the one nibbāna. If you want, you can call it the fruition of arahantship, for at this stage there are no more defilements to quibble. Or you can call it the one nibbāna. But if you want to give it the conventional label most appropriate to the actual principle, so that nothing is deficient in conventional terms, you have to say 'the one nibbāna' so as to be completely fitting with conventional reality and release in the final phase of wiping out the cemeteries of the mind of unawareness.

~ ibid pp 152-55

It is an oft-remarked upon fact that the teachings of different masters sometimes seem to contradict each other – even those of the same teacher, on occasion. These passages from this famous discourse of Ajahn Mahā Boowa are included, not to be contradictory but rather to help the reader develop a more reflective and investigative appreciation of these teachings on radiance. What he points to here is the danger of subtle forms of identification and attachment, even to such seemingly pure qualities as radiance. It is only by such repeated contemplation and exploration, through meditation practice, that we can awaken to the fundamental truth of the matter.

To round things off for this chapter – concluding this section of the book and leading us to the final division (on Cultivation and Fruition) – here are some words of Ajahn Chah that encompass the themes we have been looking at.

> 12.29) “About this mind... in truth there is nothing really wrong with it. It is intrinsically pure. Within itself it’s already peaceful. That the mind is not peaceful these days is because it follows moods. The real mind doesn’t have anything to it, it is simply (an aspect of) Nature. It becomes peaceful or agitated because moods deceive it. The untrained mind is stupid. Sense impressions come and trick it into happiness, suffering, gladness and sorrow, but the mind’s true nature is none of those things. That gladness or sadness is not the mind, but only a mood coming to deceive us. The untrained mind gets lost and follows these things, it forgets itself. Then we think that it is we who are upset or at ease or whatever.
>
> “But really this mind of ours is already unmoving and peaceful... really peaceful! Just like a leaf which is still as long as no wind blows. If a wind comes up the leaf flutters. The fluttering is due to the wind – the ‘fluttering’ is due to those sense impressions; the mind follows them. If it doesn’t follow them, it doesn’t ‘flutter.’ If we know fully the true nature of sense impressions we will be unmoved.
>
> “Our practice is simply to see the Original Mind. We must train the mind to know those sense impressions, and not get lost in them; to make it peaceful. Just this is the aim of all this difficult practice we put ourselves through.”
>
> ~ Ajahn Chah, ‘Food for the Heart,’ p 41

Cultivation and Fruition

13

PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES I

THE GRADUAL PATH

WE TURN NOW TO CONSIDER THE PRACTICES THAT facilitate the penetration of Nibbāna. These practices include views – ways of regarding the world of experience. Our view may be unreliable as a means of seeing truth. A part of the path leading to Nibbāna includes the process of reflecting on descriptions of Nibbāna so as to gain clear understanding. The need for this sort of reflection derives from the role of perception in aiding – or thwarting – the attainment of liberation.

> 13.1) Then the Venerable Ānanda went to visit the Venerable Sāriputta and on coming to him greeted him courteously... As he sat at one side the Venerable Ānanda asked the Venerable Sāriputta:
> "Friend Sāriputta, what is the reason, what is the cause why certain beings in this world are not fully set free in this very life?"
> "In this matter, friend Ānanda, beings do not understand as it really is: This perception is conducive to decline (hānabhāgiyāsaññā). They do not understand as it really is: This perception is conducive to stability (ṭhitibhāgiyāsaññā). They do not understand as it really is: This perception is conducive to distinction (visesabhāgiyāsaññā). They do not understand as it really is: This perception is conducive to penetration (nibbedhabhāgiyāsaññā). This, friend, is the reason, this is the cause why some beings in this world are not fully set free in this very life."

Similarly, the opposite reasons are why they are set free.

> ~ A 4.179

Perception is what conditions all of our thoughts, words, and deeds. As the sutta above shows, we have the opportunity to be "fully set free in this very life," but are unable to do this, as a result of our not seeing clearly. If we were able to recognize that a particular way of perception would lead to a decline in skillful states or in well-being, then we would happily relinquish it as in our best interests.

Or, as we cultivate mindfulness and a steadiness of heart and observe that this particular mode of perception leads the mind to steady states of well-being, we would naturally want to protect and nurture that perception as it increases our happiness.

If we could be more attentive to perceptions that penetrate the nature of our bodies and minds and of the world around us, our relationship to everything would be radically different. Our fascination with the world would easily be replaced with a sense of world-weariness, disenchantment, or disgust (nibbidā). In practice, this 'disgust' is an inner quality that loosens the hold of our habitual patterns of perception and conception.

It is not the emotional upheaval of finding something abhorrent, repugnant or offensive. Instead, it is closer to the roots of the word itself – "losing one's taste for," or "not delighting in its flavour," leaving the heart cool, settled and clear. This sense of disenchantment can be fostered by focusing on the drawbacks of our normal involvement in the world of sensual passions, but it can also be fostered by focusing on the positive aspects of the peace offered by Nibbāna:

> 13.2) Here, Ānanda, having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree or to an empty hut, a monk reflects thus: "This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, cessation, Nibbāna."
> ~ A 10.60 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

This perception is termed the perception of cessation, or the recollection of the peace of Nibbāna (upasamānussati), which the Buddha praised in glowing terms.

> 13.3) Monks, if even for the lasting of a finger-snap a monk should practise the recollection of the peace of Nibbāna, such a one may be called a monk. He is one whose meditation is not fruitless. He abides doing the Master's bidding. He takes advice and he eats the country's almsfood to some purpose. What could

> I not say of those who make much of recollection of the peace of Nibbāna?
> ~ A 1.20.102

But just as it is important to have an adequate conception of the goal of our practice, it is also important to gain proper knowledge of the path leading to that goal. This section on practices and perspectives provides a framework for developing that conception.

In a discourse in the Udāna, the Buddha describes the path of practice by comparing it to the continental shelf off the coast of India.

> 13.4) Just as the ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sharp drop-off only after a long stretch, in the same way this Dhamma & Vinaya has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual progression, with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch. The fact that this Dhamma & Vinaya has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual progression, with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch: This is the first amazing & astounding fact about this Dhamma & Vinaya that, as they see it again & again, has the monks greatly pleased with the Dhamma & Vinaya.
> ~ Ud. 5.5 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

This image gives a sense of the training required to reach the goal of Nibbāna: a gradually deepening practice culminating in a sudden penetration. The foundations of virtue, concentration and wisdom need to be gradually laid so that sudden penetration – which is a function of insight – can accomplish its work in truly freeing the mind.

This image of gradual training but sudden penetration will provide the framework for the discussion in this chapter and the chapters to follow. It is important to keep both sides of this perspective in mind so that, as seekers, we can avoid the problems that can come from focusing on one side to the exclusion of the other – for instance, believing that we can expect results only after long, long practice of many lifetimes, which can easily put us in the discouraging position of pursuing a goal that increasingly recedes into the distance.

Or we may believe that we are already perfectly enlightened, that effort entangles us needlessly, and that the thing to do is just be free – which leaves us doing nothing much at all and yet still mired in our entanglements. These are extreme

positions, but they highlight the extent to which the path needs to be clearly understood in order to train most effectively.

The dual nature of the path – both sudden and gradual – is dictated by the nature of the goal. Nibbāna, like all of the Dhamma, is "directly visible, immediate... to be personally experienced by the wise."

> 13.5) Once the brahmin Jāṇussoṇi approached the Blessed One... And spoke to him thus:
> "It is said, Master Gotama, 'Nibbāna is directly visible.' In what way, Master Gotama, is Nibbāna directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, worthy of application, to be personally experienced by the wise?"
> "When, brahmin, a person is impassioned with lust... Depraved through hatred... Bewildered through delusion, overwhelmed and infatuated by delusion, then he plans for his own harm, for the harm of others, for the harm of both; and he experiences in his mind suffering and grief. But when lust, hatred and delusion have been abandoned, he neither plans for his own harm, nor for the harm of others, nor for the harm of both; and he does not experience in his mind suffering and grief. In this way, brahmin, is Nibbāna directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, worthy of application, to be personally experienced by the wise."
> ~ A 3.55 (Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Thus our own direct experience is where we can recognize whether or not we are creating suffering by following lust, hatred and delusion. We can also experience the absence of suffering and the peace that ensues when we abandon those qualities. This direct perception of the results that come from putting the teachings into practice is what has inspired the followers of the Buddha to continue to practice and train in accordance with his teachings.

Although Nibbāna is immediate, the number of people who have actually seen it is infinitesimal. This is because Nibbāna is extremely subtle – so subtle that the Buddha, after first awakening, grew discouraged at the prospect of teaching it.

> 13.6) I considered: "This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced

> by the wise. But this generation delights in adhesion, takes delight in adhesion, rejoices in adhesion. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, namely, specific conditionality, dependent origination. And it is hard to see this truth, namely, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna. If I were to teach the Dhamma, others would not understand me, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me."
> ~ M 26.19 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Fortunately for us, the Buddha abandoned his hesitation and devoted himself to forty-five years of tireless service for the benefit of those who wished to practise and realize the fruits of his teachings. Nevertheless, the subtlety of the goal is what requires a gradual path of practice in which one's powers of concentration, mindfulness, and discernment become steadily heightened to the point where they lead to a direct realization of the goal. This means that an important part of the path will include practices that enable us to increase the subtlety of our powers of perception and will direct our search for the peace of Nibbāna to the point where searching is no longer necessary.

> 13.7) Bhikkhus, there are these three kinds of search. What three? The search for sensual gratification, the search for being, the search for a holy life. These are the three.
>
> A disciple of the Buddha,
> concentrated, clearly comprehending
> and mindful, knows searches
> and the origin of searches,
> where they cease and the path
> that leads to their full destruction.
> With the destruction of searches a bhikkhu,
> without longing, has attained Nibbāna.
>
> Bhikkhus, there are these three kinds of search...
>
> Sensual search, the search for being,
> the search for a holy life of one
> who takes his stand upon a view

> and holds it tightly as the truth –
> these are heapings of defilements.
>
> For a bhikkhu wholly dispassionate
> and freed by the destruction of craving,
> searches have been relinquished
> and uprooted the standpoint of views.
> With the destruction of searches a bhikkhu
> is free from desire and doubt.
> ~ Iti 54 & 55 (John D. Ireland trans.)

The Buddha taught numerous gradual practices that lead to the Awakening that puts an end to searching. An entire section in the Saṃyutta Nikāya (Chapter 43), the Connected Discourses on the Unconditioned, lays out many such practices, beginning with 1) mindfulness directed to the body; 2) serenity and insight; 3) concentration with thought and examination; concentration without thought, with examination only; concentration without thought and examination; 4) the emptiness concentration, the signless concentration, the undirected concentration (suññata samādhi, animitta samādhi, appaṇihita samādhi); 5) Four Foundations of Mindfulness; 6) Four Right Strivings; 7) Four Bases for Spiritual Power; 8) Five Spiritual Faculties; 9) Five Powers; 10) Seven Factors of Enlightenment; and 11) The Eightfold Path. These methods form the foundation of practice in the Theravāda tradition.

An accountant, Gaṇaka Moggallāna, asks the Buddha if there is a gradual training in the Buddha's teaching similar to that of an accountant:

> 13.8) It is possible, brahmin, to describe gradual training, gradual practice, and gradual progress in this Dhamma and Discipline. Just as, brahmin, when a clever horse-trainer obtains a fine thoroughbred colt, he first makes him get used to wearing the bit, and afterwards, trains him further, so when the Tathāgata obtains a person to be tamed he first disciplines him thus:

The Buddha then gives a description of training in virtue, sense restraint, moderation in eating, devotion to wakefulness, freeing the mind of the five hindrances, meditation culminating in the four jhānas.

> This is my instruction, brahmin, to those bhikkhus who are in the higher training, whose minds have not yet attained the goal, who

> abide aspiring to the supreme security from bondage. But these things conduce both to a pleasant abiding here and now and to mindfulness and full awareness for those bhikkhus who are arahants with taints destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and are completely liberated through final knowledge.
> ~ M 107.3-11 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The purpose of these ways of practice is to induce an 'inclining toward Nibbāna,' as expressed in the wanderer Vacchagotta's praises for the Buddha and his followers:

> 13.9) Just as the river Ganges inclines towards the sea, slopes towards the sea, flows towards the sea, and extends all the way to the sea, so too Master Gotama's assembly with its homeless ones and its householders inclines towards Nibbāna, slopes towards Nibbāna, flows towards Nibbāna, and extends all the way to Nibbāna.
> ~ M 73.14 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The path produces many subsidiary benefits that can easily be a distraction or sidetrack, but Nibbāna was certainly the primary purpose for the Buddha's commitment to sharing these ways of practising.

> 13.10) So this holy life, bhikkhus, does not have gain, honour, and renown for its benefit, or the attainment of virtue for its benefit, or the attainment of concentration for its benefit, or knowledge and vision for its benefit. But it is this unshakeable deliverance of mind that is the goal of this holy life, its heart-wood, and its end.
> ~ M 29.7 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 13.11) "Friend, when asked: 'But, friend, is it for the sake of purification of virtue that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?' you replied: 'No, friend.' When asked: 'Then is it for the sake of purification of mind… purification of view… purification by overcoming doubt… purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path… purification by

> knowledge and vision of the way... purification by knowledge and vision that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One?' you replied: 'No, friend.' For the sake of what then, friend, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One?"
> "Friend, it is for the sake of final Nibbāna without clinging that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One."
> ~ M 24.10 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The Buddha gives a lovely description of the gradual process of training by comparing it to the refining of gold. Given the right conditions, gold is pure, but it still can have impurities that require a process of refining. Similarly, although the mind is inherently pure and Nibbāna is 'apparent here and now,' it requires a process by which the obstructions can be cleared away.

> 13.12) There are, O monks, gross impurities in gold, such as earth and sand, gravel and grit. Now the goldsmith or his apprentice first pours the gold into a trough and washes, rinses and cleans it thoroughly. When he has done this, there still remain moderate impurities in the gold, such as fine grit and coarse sand. Then the goldsmith or his apprentice washes, rinses and cleans it again. When he has done this, there still remain minute impurities in the gold, such as fine sand and black dust. Now the goldsmith or his apprentice repeats the washing, and thereafter only the gold dust remains.
> He now pours the gold into a melting pot, smelts it and melts it together. But he does not yet take it out from the vessel, as the dross has not yet been entirely removed and the gold is not yet quite pliant, workable and bright; it is still brittle and does not yet lend itself easily to moulding. But a time comes when the goldsmith or his apprentice repeats the smelting thoroughly, so that the flaws are entirely removed. The gold is now quite pliant, workable and bright, and it lends itself easily to moulding. Whatever ornament the goldsmith now wishes to make of it, be it a diadem, earrings, a necklace or a golden chain, the gold can now be used for that purpose.
> It is similar, monks, with a monk devoted to the training in the higher mind: there are in him gross impurities, namely, bad conduct of body, speech and mind. Such conduct an earnest, capable monk abandons, dispels, eliminates and abolishes.

> When he has abandoned these, there are still impurities of a moderate degree that cling to him, namely, sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill will, and violent thoughts. Such thoughts an earnest, capable monk abandons, dispels, eliminates and abolishes.
> When he has abandoned these, there are still some subtle impurities that cling to him, namely, thoughts about his relatives, his home country and his reputation. Such thoughts an earnest, capable monk abandons, dispels, eliminates and abolishes.
> When he has abandoned these, there still remain thoughts about higher mental states experienced in meditation. That concentration is not yet peaceful and sublime; it has not attained to full tranquillity, nor has it achieved mental unification; it is maintained by strenuous suppression of the defilements.
> But there comes a time when his mind becomes inwardly steadied, composed, unified and concentrated. That concentration is then calm and refined; it has attained to full tranquillity and achieved mental unification; it is not maintained by strenuous suppression of the defilements.
> Then, to whatever mental state realizable by direct knowledge he directs his mind, he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever necessary conditions obtain.
> ~ A 3.100 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The gradual nature of the path needs to be recognized in order to summon the appropriate spiritual resources. The foremost of these is patience – not the patience of mindlessly enduring something waiting for it to finally end, but rather of applying a steady clarity of attention to the path without shrinking back or running away from its inherent obstacles. Having made the commitment to train ourselves, we need to follow through with consistency and determination. The fruits of the training do not magically appear; they reveal themselves in their own time, requiring a skillful, steady application of effort.

> 13.13) I say of such bhikkhus who are in higher training, whose minds have not yet reached the goal, and who are still aspiring to the supreme security from bondage, that they still have work to do with diligence. Why is that? Because when those venerable ones make use of suitable resting places and

> associate with good friends and balance their spiritual faculties, they may by realising for themselves with direct knowledge here and now enter upon and abide in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the home life into homelessness. Seeing this fruit of diligence for these bhikkhus, I say that they still have work to do with diligence…
>
> Bhikkhus, I do not say that final knowledge is achieved all at once. On the contrary, final knowledge is achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress.
>
> And how does there come to be gradual training, gradual practice, gradual progress? Here one who has faith (in a teacher) visits him; when he visits him, he pays respect to him; when he pays respect to him, he gives ear; one who gives ear hears the Dhamma; having heard the Dhamma, he memorises it; he examines the meaning of the teachings he has memorised; when he examines their meaning, he gains a reflective acceptance of those teachings; when he has gained a reflective acceptance of those teachings, zeal springs up in him; when zeal has sprung up, he applies his will; having applied his will, he scrutinises; having scrutinised, he strives; resolutely striving, he realises with the body the ultimate truth and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom.
>
> ~ M 70.13, .22 & .23 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

A NATURAL PATH

There is a naturalness to this gradual training. The cultivation of the basic qualities leads naturally to more advanced qualities. For example, one of the common ways of teaching the training fundamentals is to emphasize the qualities of generosity, virtue, and meditation (dāna, sīla, bhāvanā). When one is generous and delights in giving, the heart tends to be satisfied and joyous. This supports the cultivation of virtue, as a heart that is satisfied and contented easily inclines to restraint and composure. With this composure, together with the lack of remorse that virtue affords, the heart is easily settled and focused. Meditation thus progresses more smoothly and the mind naturally brightens, making it suitable for seeing things as they truly are.

It is helpful to recognize this tendency for good qualities to foster further good qualities, so that we can nurture the appropriate causes for the results we are seeking. Otherwise we can be prone to wanting to experience the fruits of the

training before the ripening has fully taken place. An image Ven. Ajahn Chah frequently used was that of a person tending an orchard. His or her duty would be to prepare the soil, fertilize the earth, water it and keep the bugs away from the tree – not to pull on the tree to make it grow faster or expectantly stand waiting for the fruit to miraculously appear. When the duties have been fulfilled properly, fruit will appear in accordance with its nature.

> 13.14) Meghiya, while the heart's deliverance is still unripe, five things lead to its ripening. What five? Firstly, a bhikkhu has good friends and companions. Secondly, a bhikkhu is perfect in virtue, restrained with the Pāṭimokkha restraint, perfect in conduct and resort, and seeing fear in the slightest fault, he trains by giving effect to the precepts of training. Thirdly, he is one who finds at will with no trouble or reserve such talk as is concerned with effacement, as favours the heart's release, as leads to complete dispassion, fading, ceasing, pacification, direct knowledge, enlightenment, Nibbāna, that is to say, talk on wanting little, on contentment, seclusion, dissociation from society, energeticness, virtue, concentration, understanding, deliverance, knowledge and vision of deliverance. Fourthly, a bhikkhu is energetic in abandoning unwholesome things and in giving effect to wholesome things; he is steadfast, persistent and untiring with respect to wholesome things. Fifthly, a bhikkhu has understanding; he has the noble ones' penetrative understanding of rise and disappearance that leads to the complete ending of suffering.
>
> Now when a bhikkhu has good friends and good companions, it can be expected of him that he will be virtuous... that he will be one who finds at will... such talk as is concerned with effacement... that he is energetic in abandoning unwholesome things and in giving effect to wholesome things... that he has the noble ones' penetrative understanding of rise and disappearance that leads to the complete ending of suffering.
>
> But in order to become established in those five things a bhikkhu should, in addition, maintain in being these four things.
>
> Loathsomeness (as the unattractive aspect of the body) should be maintained in being for the purpose of abandoning lust; loving-kindness for the purpose of abandoning ill will; mindfulness of breathing for the purpose of cutting off discursive thoughts; perception of impermanence for the purpose of eliminating the

conceit 'I am.' For when a person perceives impermanence, perception of not-self becomes established in him; and when a person perceives not-self, he arrives at the elimination of the conceit 'I am,' and that is Nibbāna here and now.
~ A 9.3, Ud 4.1 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli trans.)

13.15) Therein, bhikkhus, right view comes first. And how does right view come first? In one of right view, right intention comes into being; in one of right intention, right speech comes into being; in one of right speech, right action comes into being; in one of right action, right livelihood comes into being; in one of right livelihood, right effort comes into being; in one of right effort, right mindfulness comes into being; in one of right mindfulness, right concentration comes into being; in one of right concentration, right knowledge comes into being; in one of right knowledge, right deliverance comes into being. Thus, bhikkhus, the path of the disciple in higher training possesses eight factors, the arahant possesses ten factors.
~ M 117.34 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

13.16) It is natural that in a virtuous person, one of consummate virtue, freedom from remorse will arise... It is natural that in a person free from remorse, gladness will arise... It is natural that in a glad person, rapture will arise... It is natural that for an enraptured person, the body will be calmed... It is natural that a person of calmed body will feel pleasure... It is natural that the mind of a person feeling pleasure will become concentrated... It is natural that a person whose mind is concentrated will see things as they actually are... It is natural that a person seeing things as they actually are will grow disenchanted and dispassionate... It is natural that a disenchanted and dispassionate person will realize the knowledge and vision of release.
~ A 10.2

13.17) Bhikkhus, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfils the four foundations of mindfulness. When the four foundations of mindfulness are developed and cultivated, they fulfil the seven

> enlightenment factors. When the seven enlightenment factors are developed and cultivated, they fulfil true knowledge and deliverance.
> ~ M 118.15 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

A MIDDLE PATH

Although the path follows a natural order of development, progress is by no means assured simply by taking the first step. One needs to monitor one's progress continually to make sure that one is not wandering off the path, and to make corrections when necessary. This is why the Buddha described the path as a 'Middle Way,' and gave instructions for how to detect when one's practice is straying off to the extremes.

Ajahn Chah once said that as a teacher he simply observed people's practice like watching someone walking along a road. When they were going off in the wrong direction to the left, he called out to them, "Go right, go right." And when he saw someone going off on a tangent to the right, he would advise them, "Go left, go left."

Although we are fortunate when we can find a teacher like this to help us get started on the path, we can't rely on the teacher to monitor everything for us. We have to learn how to take on the role of monitor ourselves. In doing so, we are putting the principle of right view and our understanding of cause and effect into practice, thus gradually developing our faculty of discernment to the point where it can gain insights that are truly liberating. At the same time, we avoid the pitfalls that come from focusing too much on the length of time required to complete the path. In this way, we do not fail to recognize the importance of the steps we are taking in the immediate present.

To monitor the 'middleness' of our practice in the present requires that we never lose sight of the immediacy of the path. And it also provides us with encouragement in the practice, as we come to see for ourselves that the results of the path are not all saved to the end.

The 'middle' of the Middle Way is not an easy splitting-the-difference between one's attachments and unskillful habits, then coming up with a comfortable compromise between the two (see §9.10). It entails a careful and circumspect understanding of the way the mind works and an ability to find the balance that truly cuts through our ignorance and craving. Sometimes this balance is just that: the balancing of two extremes on a continuum that can be harmful on either end, but helpful in the middle. This is especially true in cases where the continuum concerns extremes of behavior or motivation, as in the Buddha's first words to his first five disciples:

> 13.18) Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathāgata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.
>
> And what, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna? It is this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.
>
> ~ S 56.11 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Sometimes the balance is internal and directly related to more subtle aspects of training the mind.

> 13.19) And how, bhikkhus, are the four bases for spiritual power developed and cultivated so that they are of great fruit and benefit?
>
> Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to desire and volitional formations of striving, thinking: "Thus my desire will be neither too slack nor too tense; and it will be neither constricted internally nor distracted externally." And he dwells perceiving after and before: "As before, so after; as after, so before; as below, so above; as above, so below; as by day, so at night; as at night, so by day." Thus, with a mind that is open and unenveloped, he develops the mind imbued with luminosity.
>
> He develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to energy... concentration due to mind... concentration due to investigation... he develops the mind imbued with luminosity.
>
> And what, bhikkhus, is desire that is too slack? It is desire that is accompanied by lassitude, associated with lassitude. This is called desire that is too slack.

And what, bhikkhus, is desire that is too tense? It is desire that is accompanied by restlessness, associated with restlessness. This is called desire that is too tense.

And what, bhikkhus, is desire that is constricted internally? It is desire that is accompanied by sloth and torpor, associated with sloth and torpor. This is called desire that is constricted internally.

And what, bhikkhus, is desire that is disturbed externally? It is desire that is repeatedly distracted externally, repeatedly disturbed, on account of the five cords of sensual pleasure. This is called desire that is distracted externally.

And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu dwell perceiving after and before: "As before, so after; as after, so before"? Here, bhikkhus, the perception of after and before is well grasped by a bhikkhu, well attended to, well considered, well penetrated by wisdom. It is in this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu dwells perceiving after and before: "As before, so after; as after, so before."

And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu dwell "as below, so above; as above, so below"? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu reviews this very body upwards from the soles of the feet, downwards from the tips of the hairs, enclosed in skin, as full of many kinds of impurities: "There are in this body head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, snot, fluid of the joints, urine." It is in this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu dwells "as below, so above; as above, so below."

And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu dwell "as by day, so at night; as at night, so by day"? Here, bhikkhus, at night a bhikkhu develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to desire and volitional formations of striving by way of the same qualities, the same features, the same aspects, as he develops that basis for spiritual power by day. Or else by day he develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to desire and volitional formations of striving by way of the same qualities, the same features, the same aspects, as he develops that basis for spiritual power at night. It is in this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu dwells "as by day, so at night; as at night, so by day."

> And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu, with a mind that is open and unenveloped, develop the mind imbued with luminosity? Here, bhikkhus, the perception of light is well grasped by a bhikkhu; the perception of day is well resolved upon. It is in this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu, with a mind that is open and unenveloped, develops the mind imbued with luminosity...

Similarly for the other three bases of spiritual power: energy, mind and investigation.

> When, bhikkhus, the four bases for spiritual power have been developed and cultivated in this way, a bhikkhu, by the destruction of the taints, in this very life enters and dwells in the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, realizing it for himself with direct knowledge.
> ~ S 51.20 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Other, more pithy passages, make a similar point.

> 13.20) The abandoning
> both of sensual desires,
> & of unhappiness,
> the dispelling of sloth,
> the warding off of anxieties,
> equanimity-&-mindfulness purified,
> with inspection of mental qualities
> swift in the forefront:
> That I call the gnosis of emancipation,
> the breaking open
> of ignorance.
>
> Not relishing feeling,
> inside or out:
> One living mindful in this way
> brings consciousness
> to a halt.
> SN 1106-7, 1111 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

> 13.21) Subdue greed for sensual pleasures,
> & see renunciation as rest.

> Let there be nothing grasped
> or rejected by you.
> Burn up what's *before,*
> and have nothing for *after.*
> If you don't grasp
> at what's *in between,*
> you will go about, calm.
> ~ SN 1098 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

Although these passages portray the Middle Way as balancing two ends of a continuum, there are other instances where the Buddha defines the Middle Way as a precise approach that cuts through the continuum entirely. This is especially apparent in passages where he discusses the Middle Way in terms, not of behavior or motivation, but of Right View. The Buddha often stresses the radical importance of Right View:

> 13.22) I do not envision any one other quality by which unarisen skillful qualities arise, and arisen skillful qualities go to growth and proliferation, like right view. When a person has right view, unarisen skillful qualities arise, and arisen skillful qualities go to growth and proliferation.
> ~ A 1.182

This is not a right view that is clung to as an orthodoxy. Instead, it is a correct perception of truth that leads to correct practice producing the right results. And, the practice is not clung to and upheld come what may. Instead, one must continually align one's views and practice so as to cut through the misperception that all the options available to us can be expressed in an either/or. This helps provide a perspective that is more intuitive and centered in the present moment.

> 13.23) At Sāvatthī. Then the Venerable Kaccānagotta approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him: "Venerable sir, it is said, 'right view, right view.' In what way, venerable sir, is there right view?"
> "This world, Kaccāna, for the most part depends upon a duality – upon the notion of existence and the notion of nonexistence. But for one who sees the origin of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of nonexistence in regard to the world. And for one who sees the cessation of the world as it

really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of existence in regard to the world.

"This world, Kaccāna, is for the most part shackled by engagement, clinging, and adherence. But this one [with right view] does not become engaged and cling to that engagement and clinging, mental standpoint, adherence, underlying tendency; he does not take a stand about 'my self.' He has no perplexity or doubt that what arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing. His knowledge about this is independent of others. It is in this way, Kaccāna, that there is right view.

"'All exists': Kaccāna, this is one extreme. 'All does not exist': this is the second extreme. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma by the middle..."

~ S 12.15 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

13.24) Bhikkhus, held by two kinds of views, some devas and human beings hold back and some overreach; only those with vision see.

And how, bhikkhus, do some hold back? Devas and humans enjoy being, delight in being, are satisfied with being. When Dhamma is taught to them for the cessation of being, their minds do not enter into it or acquire confidence in it or settle upon it or become resolved upon it. Thus, bhikkhus, do some hold back.

How, bhikkhus, do some overreach? Now some are troubled, ashamed and disgusted by this very same being and they rejoice in (the idea of) non-being, asserting: "In as much as this self, good sirs, when the body perishes at death, is annihilated and destroyed and does not exist after death – this is peaceful, this is excellent, this is reality!" Thus, bhikkhus, do some overreach.

How, bhikkhus, do those with vision see? Herein a bhikkhu sees what has come to be as having come to be. Having seen it thus, he practises the course for turning away, for dispassion, for the cessation of what has come to be. Thus, bhikkhus, do those with vision see.

~ Iti 49 (John D. Ireland trans.)

The act of clinging to views of being or non-being forms the basis for our misperception in life. When we hold to being, we foster a tendency to search for

ways of furthering the gratification, comfort, pleasure of that being. When we hold to non-being, the swing goes in the direction of nihilism, fear, aversion to the quality of being. This is to state the case in a somewhat oversimplified way, but as we reflect and extrapolate from these two positions we can see how they can give rise to a multitude of difficulties.

The middleness of right view avoids other continuums as well, particularly the realm of philosophical or religious speculation.

> 13.25) At Savatthi. Then a brahman cosmologist went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One,
> "Now, then, Master Gotama, does everything exist?"
> "'Everything exists' is the senior form of cosmology, brahman."
> "Then, Master Gotama, does everything not exist?"
> "'Everything does not exist' is the second form of cosmology, brahman."
> "Then is everything a Oneness?"
> "'Everything is a Oneness' is the third form of cosmology, brahman."
> "Then is everything a Plurality?"
> "'Everything is a Plurality' is the fourth form of cosmology, brahman. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form. From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media. From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering. Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications. From the cessation of fabrications comes the

cessation of consciousness. From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-&-form. From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of the six sense media. From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering."

"Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama – through many lines of reasoning – made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the community of monks. May Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life."

~ S 12.48 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

13.26) At Sāvatthi. Then the wanderer Timbaruka approached the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, he sat down to one side and said to him: "How is it, Master Gotama: are pleasure and pain created by oneself?"

"Not so, Timbaruka," the Blessed One said.

"Then, Master Gotama, are pleasure and pain created by another?"

"Not so, Timbaruka," the Blessed One said.

"How is it then, Master Gotama: are pleasure and pain created both by oneself and by another?"

"Not so, Timbaruka," the Blessed One said.

"Then, Master Gotama, have pleasure and pain arisen fortuitously, being created neither by oneself nor by another?"

"Not so, Timbaruka," the Blessed One said.

> "How is it then, Master Gotama: is there no pleasure and pain?"
> "It is not that there is no pleasure and pain, Timbaruka; there is pleasure and pain."
> "Then is it that Master Gotama does not know and see pleasure and pain?"
> "It is not that I do not know and see pleasure and pain, Timbaruka. I know pleasure and pain, I see pleasure and pain."
> "Whether you are asked: 'How is it, Master Gotama: are pleasure and pain created by oneself?' or 'Are they created by another?' or 'Are they created by both?' or 'Are they created by neither?' in each case you say: 'Not so, Timbaruka.' When you are asked: 'How is it then, Master Gotama: is there no pleasure and pain?' you say: 'It is not that there is no pleasure and pain, Timbaruka; there is pleasure and pain.' When asked: 'Then is it that Master Gotama does not know and see pleasure and pain?' you say: 'It is not that I do not know and see pleasure and pain,Timbaruka. I know pleasure and pain, I see pleasure and pain.' Venerable sir, let the Blessed One explain pleasure and pain to me. Let the Blessed One teach me about pleasure and pain."
> "Timbaruka, [if one thinks] 'The feeling and the one who feels it are the same,' [then one asserts] with reference to one existing from the beginning: 'Pleasure and pain are created by oneself.' I do not speak thus.

In a previous sutta the Buddha answers a similar question, "When one asserts thus, this amounts to eternalism."

> "But, Timbaruka, [if one thinks] 'The feeling is one, the one who feels it is another,' [then one asserts] with reference to one stricken by feeling: 'Pleasure and pain are created by another.' Neither do I speak thus."

In a previous sutta the Buddha answers a similar question,"When one asserts thus, this amounts to annihilationism."

> "Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma by the middle:
> 'With ignorance as condition, volitional formations [come to be]; with volitional formations as condition, consciousness... Such is

> the origin of this whole mass of suffering. But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of volitional formations, cessation of consciousness... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.'"
> When this was said, the naked ascetic Timbaruka said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, Master Gotama!... I go for refuge to Master Gotama, and to the Dhamma, and to the Bhikkhu Sangha. From today let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life."
> ~ S 12.18 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 13.27) On one occasion Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita were staying near Vārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana. Then in the evening, arising from his seclusion, Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita went to Ven. Sāriputta and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to Ven. Sāriputta: "Now tell me, Sāriputta my friend: Are aging & death self-made or other-made or both self-made & other-made, or – without self-making or other-making – do they arise spontaneously?"
> "It's not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that aging & death are self-made, that they are other-made, that they are both self-made & other-made, or that – without self-making or other-making – they arise spontaneously. However, from birth as a requisite condition comes aging & death..."

A similar exchange continues through the other links of conditioned arising.

> "It's amazing, friend Sāriputta. It's astounding, friend Sāriputta, how well that was said by Ven. Sāriputta. And I rejoice in Ven. Sāriputta's good statements with regard to these 36 topics. If a monk teaches the Dhamma for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, & cessation with regard to aging & death, he deserves to be called a monk who is a speaker of Dhamma. If he practices for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, & cessation with regard to aging & death, he deserves to be called a monk who

> practices the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. If – through disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, and lack of clinging/sustenance with regard to aging & death – he is released, then he deserves to be called a monk who has attained Nibbāna in the here-&-now...”

Similarly for the other links of conditioned arising.

> ~ S 12.67 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

The need for a gradual path of practice becomes clearer as we recognize the many diversions that can pull us off the path. Without a clearly laid out step-by-step training, it would be very easy to wander haphazardly, looking for some ill-defined spiritual dénouement, or to immerse oneself in a series of nebulous and vague practices that don’t really lead anywhere other than to more confusion and difficulty. By relying on the middle path, we can directly cut through the internal and external sources of confusion that distract the mind from realizing Nibbāna. This will ultimately require a radical letting go or relinquishment, but this is precisely what this gradual path and its Middle Way are preparing us for.

14

PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES II

Sudden penetration

The directness of the Buddha's teaching is an aspect that practitioners reflect on regularly. The daily chanting in the Theravada tradition refers to the Dhamma's being 'sandiṭṭhiko' – apparent here and now or directly visible – and 'akāliko' – timeless or immediate.

In order to utilize truly the legacy of the Buddha's guidance, we need to apply the ways of practice as directly and immediately as we can. Although there are '84,000 Dhamma doors,' the clear penetration of one door is what leads to Nibbāna.

We can compare doors, or create doors, or sand and paint doors, but that doesn't get us through them. So being attentive to what will take us through directly is a necessary part of our practice. In the same way that we can wander aimlessly for a long time along a wilderness path, we can wander along the Buddha's path of practice in a way that is less than efficacious if we are not wisely considering how to implement that path directly and realize its true purpose.

> 14.1) Bhikkhus, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realisation of Nibbāna – namely, the four foundations of mindfulness.
> ~ M 10.2 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 14.2) Here, Hemaka,
> with regard to things that are dear
> – seen, heard, sensed, & cognized –

> there is: the dispelling of passion & desire,
> the undying state of Nibbāna.
>
> Those knowing this, mindful,
> fully unbound
> in the here & now,
>
> are forever calmed,
> have crossed over beyond
> entanglement in the world.
> ~ SN 1086-7 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

A central part of the direct path of the Buddha is 'letting go' or 'not clinging.' This is something we must do in the present and recognize the result in the here and now. The degree to which we are able to let go, together with the correctness or appropriateness of that letting go, is what will determine its effect. When we 'let go' of goodness and virtue, as in just dropping or neglecting them, that would tend to create more suffering and problems. When we let go of our destructive habits in a skillful way, it has a very different effect. Letting go of subtle obstructions has a more refined result.

To continue with the image of the continental shelf of India – its gradual slope, then its sharp dropping off – there is a need to be laying the gradual foundation of practice firmly and to sharpen our discernment continually by monitoring our progress, but there is also a need to be looking for the point of letting go that leads to penetration.

The Buddha continually pointed to wisdom as the central factor of the path. This underlies the training, as well as modulating the training so that it bears fruit in release. The Noble Eightfold Path begins with the wisdom factors – right view and right resolve. The five spiritual faculties of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom, culminate with wisdom. Any 'letting go' has to rely on wisdom.

> 14.3) Bhikkhus, just as the footprints of all living beings that walk fit into the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant's footprint is declared to be their chief by reason of its size, so too, among the steps that lead to enlightenment, the faculty of wisdom is declared to be their chief, that is, for the attainment of enlightenment.
> ~ S 48.54 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 14.4) It is, bhikkhus, because he has developed and cultivated one faculty that a bhikkhu who has destroyed the taints declares final knowledge thus. What is that one faculty? The faculty of wisdom. For a noble disciple who possesses wisdom, the faith that follows from it becomes stabilized, the energy that follows from it becomes stabilized, the mindfulness that follows from it becomes stabilized, the concentration that follows from it becomes stabilized.
> It is, bhikkhus, because this one faculty has been developed and cultivated that a bhikkhu who has destroyed the taints declares final knowledge thus: "I understand: Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being."
> ~ S 48.45 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 14.5) Here, Moggallāna, a monk has learnt this: "Nothing is fit to be clung to." If a monk has learnt that nothing is fit to be clung to, he directly knows everything; by directly knowing everything, he fully understands everything; when he fully understands everything, whatever feeling he experiences, be it pleasant, painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, in regard to those same feelings he dwells contemplating impermanence, contemplating dispassion, contemplating cessation, contemplating relinquishment. When he thus abides contemplating impermanence, dispassion, cessation, and relinquishment in regard to those feelings, he does not cling to anything in the world; without clinging he is not agitated; being unagitated, he personally attains Nibbāna.
> ~ A 7.58 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

A discourse in the Saṃyutta Nikāya also contains this same phrase, "Nothing is fit to be clung to," (Pali: sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya). In this particular version, it is translated as "Nothing is worth adhering to." With this perception and attitude in mind, there can be a radical shift in how one relates to the world, and this shift then opens the way to freedom:

> 14.6) "But, venerable sir, how should a bhikkhu know, how should he see, for ignorance to be abandoned by him and true knowledge to arise?"

> "Here, bhikkhu, a bhikkhu has heard, 'Nothing is worth adhering to.' When a bhikkhu has heard, 'Nothing is worth adhering to,' he directly knows everything. Having directly known everything, he fully understands everything. Having fully understood everything, he sees all signs differently. He sees the eye differently, he sees forms differently [and so on with all the sense bases]... whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition... that too he sees differently.
> "When, bhikkhu, a bhikkhu knows and sees thus, ignorance is abandoned by him and true knowledge arises."
> ~ S 35.80 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The non-clinging leading to release is not a blanket or indiscriminate letting go of everything. There needs to be discernment as to what is appropriate and what will facilitate the realization of the end of suffering. Ajahn Chah used the simile of purchasing a coconut to illustrate this point:

> 14.7) The Buddha says we must practise by letting go. It's hard to understand this practice of letting go, isn't it? If we let go, then we don't practise, right? Because we've let go.
> Suppose you went to buy some coconuts in the market, and while you were carrying them back someone asked why you bought them.
> "I bought them to eat," you say.
> "Are you going to eat the shells as well? No? I don't believe you! If you're not going to eat the shells, then why did you buy them too?"
> Well, how are you going to answer? We practise with desire. If we didn't have desire, we wouldn't practise. Practising with desire is taṇhā. Contemplating in this way can give rise to wisdom, you know. As for those coconuts, of course you are not going to eat the shells. Then why do you take them? Because the time hasn't yet come for you to throw them away. They're useful for wrapping up the coconut. If, after eating the coconut, you throw the shells away, there is no problem.
> Our practice is like this. When the Buddha instructs us not to act on desire, speak from desire, or walk or sit or eat with desire, he means we should do these things with detachment. It's just like bringing coconuts from the market. We're not going to eat the

> shells, but it's not yet time to throw them away. The coconut milk, the husk, and the shell all come together; when we buy a coconut we buy the whole package. If somebody wants to accuse us of eating coconut shells that's their business; we know what we're doing. This is how the practice is.
> ~ Ajahn Chah, 'Food for the Heart,' pp 241-2

What is to be let go of? The Buddha points to four basic types of clinging (upādāna) that lead to entanglement and suffering. When we are able to relinquish these forms of clinging and the ignorance on which they are based, the heart has the opportunity to experience freedom.

> 14.8) Bhikkhus, when ignorance is abandoned and true knowledge has arisen in a bhikkhu, then with the fading away of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge he no longer clings to sensual pleasures (kāmupādāna), no longer clings to views (diṭṭhupādāna), no longer clings to rules and observances (sīlabbatupādāna), no longer clings to a doctrine of self (attavādupādāna). When he does not cling, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he personally attains Nibbāna. He understands: "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being."
> ~ M 11.17 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The first type is clinging to sensual desires:

> 14.9) On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Bhaggas at Suṃsumāragira in the Bhesakaḷā Grove, the Deer Park. Then the householder Nakulapitā approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, stood by one side, and said to him: "Venerable sir, what is the cause and reason why some beings here do not attain Nibbāna in this very life? And what is the cause and reason why some beings here attain Nibbāna in this very life?"
> "There are, Nakulapitā, forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, lovely, agreeable, pleasing, sensually enticing, tantalizing. If a bhikkhu seeks delight in them, welcomes them,

> and remains holding to them, his consciousness becomes dependent upon them and clings to them. A bhikkhu with clinging does not attain Nibbāna.
> "There are, Nakulapitā, sounds cognizable by the ear... mental phenomena cognizable by the mind that are desirable, lovely, agreeable, pleasing, sensually enticing, tantalizing. If a bhikkhu seeks delight in them, welcomes them and remains holding to them, his consciousness becomes dependent upon them and clings to them. A bhikkhu with clinging does not attain Nibbāna.
> "This is the cause and reason, Nakulapitā, why some beings here do not attain Nibbāna in this very life.
> "There are, Nakulapitā, forms cognizable by the eye... mental phenomena cognizable by the mind that are desirable, lovely, agreeable, pleasing, sensually enticing, tantalizing. If a bhikkhu does not seek delight in them, does not welcome them, and does not remain holding to them, his consciousness does not become dependent upon them or cling to them. A bhikkhu without clinging attains Nibbāna.
> "This is the cause and reason, Nakulapitā, why some beings here attain Nibbāna in this very life."
> ~ S 35.131 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The next passage illustrates the danger of clinging to a belief in purification through rule or vow. In the time of the Buddha (as in ours!) many types of practices were assiduously followed with the assumption that they would bring about some spiritual purification or desirable result. These could range from grim ascetic practices to quite beautiful rituals, but the Buddha was adamant in asserting that without wisdom leading the way and permeating any practices undertaken, they would not bring about the hoped-for result. Practice and goal have to be commensurate.

> 14.10) Then Puṇṇa, son of the Koliyans, an ox-duty ascetic, and also Seniya, a naked dog-duty ascetic, went to the Blessed One. Puṇṇa, the ox-duty ascetic, paid homage to the Blessed One and sat down at one side, while Seniya, the naked dog-duty ascetic, exchanged greetings with the Blessed One, and when this courteous and amiable talk was finished, he too sat down at one side curled up like a dog. Puṇṇa, the ox-duty ascetic, said to the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, this Seniya is a naked dog-duty ascetic who does

> what is hard to do: he eats his food when it is thrown to the ground. He has long taken up and practised that dog-duty. What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"
> "Enough, Puṇṇa, let that be. Do not ask me that."
> A second time... And a third time Puṇṇa, the ox-duty ascetic, said to the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, this Seniya is a naked dog-duty ascetic who does what is hard to do: he eats his food when it is thrown to the ground. He has long taken up and practised that dog-duty. What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"
> "Well, Puṇṇa, since I certainly cannot persuade you when I say: 'Enough, Puṇṇa, let that be. Do not ask me that,' I shall therefore answer you.
> "Here, Puṇṇa, someone develops the dog-duty fully and uninterruptedly; he develops the dog-habit fully and uninterruptedly; he develops the dog-mind fully and uninterruptedly; he develops dog-behaviour fully and uninterruptedly. Having done so, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in the company of dogs. But if he has such a view as this: 'By this virtue or observance or asceticism or holy life I shall become a [great] god or some [lesser] god,' that is wrong view in his case. Now there are two destinations for one with wrong view, I say: hell or the animal realm. So, Puṇṇa, if his dog-duty succeeds, it will lead him to the company of dogs; if it fails, it will lead him to hell."
> When this was said, Seniya the naked dog-duty ascetic cried out and burst into tears.
> ~ M 57.2-4 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli &Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The third aspect of clinging is to views. As human beings we have the tendency to want to fasten onto views, not for their efficacy in eliminating suffering, but for what we see as their truth in and of themselves.

These views can range from our idea of how the world is around us, to our opinions of others, to our speculation as to how things should be. Inevitably, as the Buddha points out, this leads to confusion, frustration and conflict.

> 14.11) There are, bhikkhus, these two views: the view of existence and the view of extermination. Therein, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple reflects thus: "Is there anything in the

> world that I could cling to without being blameworthy?" He understands thus: "There is nothing in the world that I could cling to without being blameworthy. For if I should cling, it is only form that I would be clinging to, only feeling... only perception ... only volitional formations... only consciousness that I would be clinging to. With that clinging of mine as condition, there would be existence; with existence as condition, birth; with birth as condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair would come to be. Such would be the origin of this whole mass of suffering.
> ~ S 22.80 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The Buddha says here that although there are just two views of existence and non-existence, they are the basis for all the multitudinous views that can be held in this human realm. When our vision is obscured, all we can see is a blur. With things unclear, all we can do is guess at the actuality of a situation. Given this internal confusion, it is no wonder that there is so much external confusion in the world. However, when there is right view and clear vision, there is no need for confusion or conflict. As Ajahn Chah says, if we see a cobra clearly then we won't go near it. As a result, it won't harm us. In the same way, when we are aware of the harm that can arise from our views, we can also step back from them.

> 14.12) Bhikkhus, there are these two views: the view of being and the view of non-being. Any recluses or brahmins who rely on the view of being, adopt the view of being, accept the view of being, are opposed to the view of non-being. Any recluses or brahmins who rely on the view of non-being, adopt the view of non-being, accept the view of non-being, are opposed to the view of being.
> Any recluses or brahmins who do not understand as they actually are the origin, the disappearance, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these two views are affected by lust, affected by hate, affected by delusion, affected by craving, affected by clinging, without vision, given to favouring and opposing, and they delight in and enjoy proliferation. They are not freed from birth, ageing, and death; from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; they are not freed from suffering, I say.
> ~ M 11.6-7 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Part of the suffering created by views is the conflict they foster. This conflict may not always come from the views themselves, but rather from the way they are held tightly.

Whether they are religious, political, personal or social; whether they are reasonable or unreasonable; whether they are logical or illogical; the cherishing of views is what leads to conflict. Thus the path to peace and harmony lies in letting them go.

> 14.13) Now, Aggivessana, a wise man among those recluses and brahmins who holds the doctrine and view 'Everything is acceptable to me' considers thus: 'If I obstinately adhere to my view "Everything is acceptable to me" and declare: "Only this is true, anything else is wrong," then I may clash with the two others: with a recluse or brahmin who holds the doctrine and view "Nothing is acceptable to me" and with a recluse or brahmin who holds the doctrine and view "Something is acceptable to me, something is not acceptable to me." I may clash with these two, and when there is a clash, there are disputes; when there are disputes, there are quarrels; when there are quarrels, there is vexation.' Foreseeing for himself clashes, disputes, quarrels, and vexation, he abandons that view and does not take up some other view. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of these views; this is how there comes to be the relinquishing of these views.

And similarly when adhering to the other views of 'Nothing is acceptable to me' and 'Something is acceptable to me, something is not acceptable to me'

> ~ M 74.6-8 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

At the time of the Buddha, religious teachers commonly staked out their philosophical ground in terms of a standard set of ten speculative questions. The Buddha was very circumspect in not engaging in these philosophical speculations as he felt them to be a major distraction rather than an aid in the training that he himself encouraged.

> 14.14) Therefore, Mālunkyāputta, remember what I have left undeclared as undeclared, and remember what I have declared

> as declared. And what have I left undeclared? 'The world is eternal' – I have left undeclared. 'The world is not eternal' – I have left undeclared. 'The world is finite' – I have left undeclared. 'The world is infinite' – I have left undeclared. 'The soul is the same as the body' – I have left undeclared. 'The soul is one thing and the body another' – I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata exists' – I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist' – I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist' – I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist' – I have left undeclared.
>
> Why have I left that undeclared? Because it is unbeneficial, it does not belong to the fundamentals of the holy life, it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. That is why I have left it undeclared.
>
> ~ M 63.7-8 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The next discourse is from the Sutta Nipāta. It is one of many with a sense of the primacy the Buddha gave to non-attachment to views as the way to the goal.

> 14.15) The sage has abandoned the notion of self or ego and is free from clinging. He does not depend even on knowledge; he does not take sides in the midst of controversy; he has no dogmatic views.
>
> For him there is no desire to strive for this or that, in this world or the next. He has ceased to associate with dogmas for he no longer requires the solace that dogmas offer.
>
> To the sage there is not the slightest prejudiced view with regard to things seen, heard or felt. How can anyone in the world characterize by thought such a pure one who does not dogmatically grasp any views?
>
> They neither form any particular dogma nor prefer anything. Dogmatic views are not esteemed by them. The brahmin is not led by rule and rite. Thus, the steadfast one has gone to the further shore, never more to return.
>
> ~ SN 800-3 (Ven. H. Saddhatissa trans.)

The fourth type of clinging is clinging to doctrines of self. It is usually translated as 'doctrines,' but it is more the habit or tendency of perceiving in terms of a self. This can be presented in the teachings as something very abstruse, but such habits all grow from some very common but unwise ways of framing issues in our minds.

> 14.16) This is how he attends unwisely: "Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I become in the future?" Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the present thus: "Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?"
> When he attends unwisely in this way, one of six views arises in him. The view "self exists for me" arises in him as true and established; or the view "no self exists for me" arises in him as true and established; or the view "I perceive self with self" arises in him as true and established; or the view "I perceive not-self with self" arises in him as true and established; or the view "I perceive self with not-self" arises in him as true and established; or else he has some such view as this: "It is this self of mine that speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions; but this self of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity." This speculative view, bhikkhus, is called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; he is not freed from suffering, I say.
> ~ M 2.7-8 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Setting down the urge toward the creation of the self and all the ideas or views that are attendant on that, the heart is able to experience peace. This is difficult, as the permutations of clinging to the doctrine of self are so extensive. Although letting go may seem straightforward and logical, the habits we have accumulated that keep us repeating the pattern of attachment are deeply set.

There tends to be an assumption that the teachings around not-self are abstract. Rather, they are a very practical assessment of how best to relate to the basic conditions of our life: things that are often too close or too familiar for us to see clearly. When we can realize that we are clinging to ideas or conceptions that do not accord with reality and that actually intensify our suffering, we can step back, cool the ardour of our delusion and relax our grip in order to put down what really didn't belong to us in the first place.

> 14.17) "Bhikkhus, what do you think? Is material form permanent or impermanent?" – "Impermanent, venerable sir." – "Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?" – "Suffering, venerable sir." – "Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?" – "No, venerable sir."
>
> "Bhikkhus, what do you think: Is feeling... perception... formations… consciousness permanent or impermanent?" – "Impermanent, venerable sir." – "Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?" – "Suffering, venerable sir." – "Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: "This is mine, this I am, this is myself'?" – "No, venerable sir."
>
> "Therefore, bhikkhus, any kind of material form whatever, whether past, future, or present... all material form should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.' Any kind of feeling whatever... Any kind of perception whatever... Any kind of formations whatever... Any kind of consciousness whatever... all consciousness should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'
>
> "Seeing thus, a well-taught noble disciple becomes disenchanted with material form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with formations, disenchanted with consciousness.
>
> "Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion [his mind] is liberated. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: 'It is liberated.' He understands: 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.'"
>
> That is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied

> and delighted in the Blessed One's words. Now while this discourse was being spoken, through not clinging the minds of sixty bhikkhus were liberated from the taints.
> ~ M 109.15-18 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Inextricably bound up with our sense of ourselves is our perception of the world outside of ourselves. Again, this is a perception that needs careful attention. As the Buddha pointed out, our experience of the world outside us is composed simply of sense impressions making contact with sense organs; not something separate from ourselves.

> 14.18) Then a certain monk went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One: "'The world, the world (loka),' it is said. In what respect does the word 'world' apply?"
> "Insofar as it disintegrates (lujjati), monk, it is called the 'world.' Now what disintegrates? The eye disintegrates. Forms disintegrate. Consciousness at the eye disintegrates. Contact at the eye disintegrates. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the eye – experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain – that too disintegrates.
> "The ear disintegrates. Sounds disintegrate...
> "The nose disintegrates. Aromas disintegrate...
> "The tongue disintegrates. Tastes disintegrate...
> "The body disintegrates. Tactile sensations disintegrate...
> "The intellect disintegrates. Ideas disintegrate. Consciousness at the intellect disintegrates. Contact at the intellect disintegrates. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the intellect – experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain – that too disintegrates.
> "Insofar as it disintegrates, it is called the 'world.'"
> ~ S 35.82 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

> 14.19) Friends, when the Blessed One rose from his seat and entered his dwelling after reciting a synopsis in brief without expounding the meaning in detail, that is: "Bhikkhus, I say that the end of the world cannot be known, seen, or reached by travelling. Yet, bhikkhus, I also say that without reaching the end of the world there is no making an end to suffering,"

> I understand the detailed meaning of this synopsis as follows: That in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world – this is called the world in the Noble One's Discipline. And what, friends, is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world? The eye is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world. The ear… The nose… The tongue… The body… The mind is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world. That in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world – this is called the world in the Noble One's Discipline.
> ~ S 35.116 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Because our sense impressions are so dependent on our sense organs, the sense of the world 'out there' as opposed to our self 'in here' does not accord with direct experience. When we see how this false dichotomy causes suffering, we will drop it and be released from our attachment both to 'self' and to 'world.'

> 14.20) Cunda, as to those various views that arise in the world associated either with doctrines of a self or with doctrines about the world: if [the object] in relation to which those views arise, which they underlie, and which they are exercised upon is seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self," then the abandoning and relinquishing of those views comes about.
> ~ M 8.3 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 14.21) Then the Blessed One, having understood, "This is Māra the Evil One," addressed Māra the Evil One in verse:
> "Form, feeling, and perception,
> Consciousness, and formations –
> 'I am not this, this isn't mine,'
> Thus one is detached from it.
>
> "Though they seek him everywhere,
> Māra and his army do not find him:
> The one thus detached, secure,
> Who has gone beyond all fetters."
> ~ S 4.16 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

14.22) Bhikkhus, being stirred is a disease, being stirred is a tumour, being stirred is a dart. Therefore, bhikkhus, the Tathāgata dwells unstirred, with the dart removed. Therefore, bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu should wish, "May I dwell unstirred, with the dart removed!" he should not conceive the eye, should not conceive in the eye, should not conceive from the eye, should not conceive, "The eye is mine."

He should not conceive forms... eye-consciousness... eye-contact ... and as to whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition... he should not conceive that, should not conceive in that, should not conceive from that, should not conceive, "That is mine."

He should not conceive the ear... [and through the other sense bases]... He should not conceive the mind... mental phenomena... mind-consciousness... mind-contact... and as to whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition... he should not conceive that, should not conceive in that, should not conceive from that, should not conceive, "That is mine."

He should not conceive all, should not conceive in all, should not conceive from all, should not conceive, "All is mine."

Since he does not conceive anything thus, he does not cling to anything in the world. Not clinging, he is not agitated. Being unagitated, he personally attains Nibbāna. He understands: "Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being."

~ S 35.90 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

14.23) So subtle, bhikkhus, was the bondage of Vepacitti, but even subtler than that is the bondage of Māra. In conceiving, one is bound by Māra; by not conceiving, one is freed from the Evil One.

Bhikkhus, "I am" is a conceiving; "I am this" is a conceiving; "I shall be" is a conceiving; "I shall not be" is a conceiving; "I shall consist of form" is a conceiving; "I shall be formless" is a conceiving; 'I shall be percipient' is a conceiving; "I shall be non-percipient" is a conceiving; "I shall be neither percipient nor nonpercipient" is a conceiving. Conceiving is a disease, conceiving is a tumour, conceiving is a dart. Therefore, bhikkhus,

you should train yourselves thus: "We will dwell with a mind devoid of conceiving."

Bhikkhus, "I am" is a perturbation; "I am this" is a perturbation; "I shall be" is a perturbation... "I shall be neither percipient nor nonpercipient" is a perturbation. Perturbation is a disease, perturbation is a tumour, perturbation is a dart. Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: "We will dwell with an imperturbable mind."

Bhikkhus, "I am" is a palpitation; "I am this" is a palpitation; "I shall be" is a palpitation... "I shall be neither percipient nor nonpercipient" is a palpitation. Palpitation is a disease, palpitation is a tumour, palpitation is a dart. Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: "We will dwell with a mind devoid of palpitation."

Bhikkhus, "I am" is a proliferation; "I am this" is a proliferation; "I shall be" is a proliferation... "I shall be neither percipient nor nonpercipient" is a proliferation. Proliferation is a disease, proliferation is a tumour, proliferation is a dart. Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: "We will dwell with a mind devoid of proliferation."

Bhikkhus, "I am" is an involvement with conceit; "I am this" is an involvement with conceit; "I shall be" is an involvement with conceit; "I shall not be" is an involvement with conceit; "I shall consist of form" is an involvement with conceit; "I shall be formless" is an involvement with conceit; "I shall be percipient" is an involvement with conceit; "I shall be nonpercipient" is an involvement with conceit; "I shall be neither percipient nor nonpercipient" is an involvement with conceit. Involvement with conceit is a disease, involvement with conceit is a tumour, involvement with conceit is a dart. Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: "We will dwell with a mind in which conceit has been struck down." Thus should you train yourselves.

~ S 35.248 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

14.24) The wise person does not rate himself with the distinguished, the lowest, nor with ordinary people; calm and unselfish, he is free from possessiveness: he holds on to nothing

> and he rejects nothing.
> ~ SN 954 (Ven. H. Saddhatissa trans.)

There is no distinct division between the four different forms of clinging. Having clung to sensual pleasure (or to views, rites or self), doesn't mean we are exempt from the other forms of clinging. One form of clinging can easily condition another. Similarly, unravelling one form of clinging can lead to the unravelling of others.

> 14.25) Vaccha, "speculative view" is something that the Tathāgata has put away. For the Tathāgata, Vaccha, has seen this: "Such is material form, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is feeling, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is perception, such its origin, such its disappearance; such are formations, such their origin, such their disappearance; such is consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance." Therefore, I say, with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of all conceivings, all excogitations, all I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit, the Tathāgata is liberated through not clinging.
> ~ M 72.15 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

True letting go does not come about by only repeating the words of the Buddha's teaching. There needs to be an unambiguous understanding of the difficulties that ensue from grasping or clinging, and an unwavering discernment that can let go of whatever clinging leads to suffering. As explained in this next sutta, the mind that generates mental formations continues to create the causes for its entanglements, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. With wisdom as the foundation, the mind can dwell with non-clinging as its base and realize true peace by not generating any volitional formations. This ability is not a void, empty state resembling a vacuum. Instead, it is a dynamic state of equipoise that relies on a balance of faculties and discernment rooted in non-clinging.

> 14.26) Bhikkhus, if a person immersed in ignorance generates a meritorious volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the meritorious; if he generates a demeritorious volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the demeritorious; if he generates an imperturbable volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the imperturbable. But when a bhikkhu has abandoned ignorance

> and aroused true knowledge, then, with the fading away of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge, he does not generate a meritorious volitional formation, or a demeritorious volitional formation, or an imperturbable volitional formation. Since he does not generate or fashion volitional formations, he does not cling to anything in the world. Not clinging, he is not agitated. Not being agitated, he personally attains Nibbāna. He understands: "Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being."
> ~ S 12.51 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 14.27) The Blessed One said this: "A monk should investigate in such a way that, his consciousness neither externally scattered & diffused, nor internally positioned, he would from lack of clinging/sustenance be unagitated. When – his consciousness neither externally scattered & diffused, nor internally positioned – from lack of clinging/sustenance he would be unagitated, there is no seed for the conditions of future birth, aging, death, or stress."
> ~ M 138.3 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

Even the right view that induces non-clinging cannot be clung to as an end in and of itself. Although it forms a central part of the path of practice – keeping us on course and focused in the present – it has to be abandoned when it has done its work, so that true release can follow.

> 14.28) He doesn't speak of purity
> in connection with view,
> learning,
> knowledge,
> precept or practice.
> Nor is it found by a person
> Through lack of view,
> of learning,
> of knowledge,
> of precept or practice.
> Letting these go, without grasping,
> at peace,

independent,
one wouldn't long for becoming.
~ SN 839 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

14.29) They don't conjure, don't yearn,
don't proclaim "utter purity."
Untying the tied-up knot of grasping,
they don't form a desire for
any
thing
at all in the world.

The brahman
gone beyond territories,
has nothing that
– on knowing or seeing –
he's grasped.
Unimpassionate for passion,
not impassioned for dispassion,
he has nothing here
that he's grasped as supreme.
~ SN 794-5 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

14.30) As a drop of water does not stick to a lotus leaf or as a lotus flower is untainted by the water, so the sage does not cling to anything – seen, heard or thought.
The liberated one does not seek anything that is seen, heard or thought. He does not seek purity through anything else for he has neither passion nor dispassion.
~ SN 812-13 (Ven H. Saddhatissa trans.)

14.31) And you ask about the Wanderer. When you see which actions hurt and when you leave those actions and are not in those actions, or above or below or beyond or between or anywhere near those actions, then you are a Wanderer.
~ SN 537 (Ven H. Saddhatissa trans.)

14.32) He who has nothing
– in front, behind, in between –

> the one with nothing
> who clings to no thing:
> he's what I call
> a brahmin.
> ~ Dhp 421 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

> 14.33) Gone to the beyond of becoming,
> you let go of in front,
> let go of behind,
> let go of between.
> With a heart everywhere let-go,
> you don't come again to birth
> & aging.
> ~ Dhp 348 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

Lastly, as Ajahn Chah puts it very simply and succinctly:

> 14.34) If you let go a little, you will have a little peace. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace. If you let go completely, you will know complete peace and freedom.
> ~ 'A Still Forest Pool,' p 73, (ed. Jack Kornfield & Paul Breiter)

15

PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES III

PATH AND GOAL

HOW, THEN, DOES THE PATH OF PRACTICE YIELD AN EXPERIENCE of the goal? This question requires careful consideration, for there are many misconceptions of this relationship that can get in the way of actually reaching the goal, even after genuine progress on the path. In the Milindapañha, the monk Nāgasena replies to this question with an analogy: The path of practice doesn't *cause* Nibbāna, it simply takes you there, in the same way that the road to a mountain does not cause the mountain to come into being but simply leads you to where it already is. The question remains, however: To what extent is the goal radically different from the path, to what extent is it similar, and how much of the path carries over into the life of the arahant after the attainment of Nibbāna? Or, expressed in terms of Nāgasena's analogy: To what extent does one abandon the road to set foot on the mountain, and to what extent do the muscles developed by following the road continue to serve one in good stead while wandering the mountainside?

To begin with, we must remember that the path is not identical with the goal; the practice sometimes requires elements that need to be abandoned when the goal is reached.

> 15.1) Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Venerable Ānanda was dwelling at Kosambī in Ghosita's Park. Then the brahmin Uṇṇābha approached the Venerable Ānanda and exchanged greetings with him. When they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, he sat down to one side and said to the Venerable Ānanda: "For what purpose, Master Ānanda, is the holy life lived under the ascetic Gotama?"
>
> "It is for the sake of abandoning desire, brahmin, that the holy life is

lived under the Blessed One."

"But, Master Ānanda, is there a path, is there a way for the abandoning of this desire?"

"There is a path, brahmin, there is a way for the abandoning of this desire."

"But, Master Ānanda, what is the path, what is the way for the abandoning of this desire?"

"Here, brahmin, a bhikkhu develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to desire and volitional formations of striving. He develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to energy... concentration due to mind... concentration due to investigation and volitional formations of striving. This, brahmin, is the path, this is the way for the abandoning of this desire."

"Such being the case, Master Ānanda, the situation is interminable, not terminable. It is impossible that one can abandon desire by means of desire itself."

"Well then, brahmin, I will question you about this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think, brahmin, did you earlier have the desire, 'I will go to the park,' and after you went to the park, did the corresponding desire subside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you earlier arouse energy, thinking, 'I will go to the park,' and after you went to the park, did the corresponding energy subside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you earlier make up your mind, 'I will go to the park,' and after you went to the park, did the corresponding resolution subside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you earlier make an investigation, 'Shall I go to the park?' and after you went to the park, did the corresponding investigation subside?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is exactly the same, brahmin, with a bhikkhu who is an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached his own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, and is completely liberated through final knowledge. He earlier had the desire for the attainment

> of arahantship, and when he attained arahantship, the corresponding desire subsided. He earlier had aroused energy for the attainment of arahantship, and when he attained arahantship, the corresponding energy subsided. He earlier had made up his mind to attain arahantship, and when he attained arahantship, the corresponding resolution subsided. He earlier made an investigation for the attainment of arahantship, and when he attained arahantship, the corresponding investigation subsided.
> “What do you think, brahmin, such being the case, is the situation terminable or interminable?”
> “Surely, Master Ānanda, such being the case, the situation is terminable not interminable. Magnificent, Master Ānanda!... From today let Master Ānanda remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life.”
> ~ S 51.15 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Although negative qualities must obviously be abandoned on reaching the goal, other, more positive qualities, such as right view, must be abandoned as well, as we noted in the preceding chapter. Even the most exalted states of meditative emptiness, which may contain a lurking sense of self-identification, have to be abandoned in order to reach the goal of total freedom.

> 15.2) When this was said, the venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, here a bhikkhu is practising thus: ‘It might not be, and it might not be mine; it will not be, and it will not be mine. What exists, what has come to be, that I am abandoning.’ Thus he obtains equanimity. Venerable sir, does such a bhikkhu attain Nibbāna?”
> “One bhikkhu here, Ānanda, might attain Nibbāna, another bhikkhu here might not attain Nibbāna.”
> “What is the cause and reason, venerable sir, why one bhikkhu here might attain Nibbāna, while another bhikkhu here might not attain Nibbāna?”
> “Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu is practising thus: ‘It might not be, and it might not be mine; it will not be, and it will not be mine. What exists, what has come to be, that I am abandoning.’ Thus he obtains equanimity. He delights in that equanimity, welcomes it,

and remains holding to it. As he does so, his consciousness becomes dependent on it and clings to it. A bhikkhu, Ānanda, who is affected by clinging does not attain Nibbāna."

"But, venerable sir, when that bhikkhu clings, what does he cling to?"

"To the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, Ānanda."

"When that bhikkhu clings, venerable sir, it seems he clings to the best [object of] clinging."

"When that bhikkhu clings, Ānanda, he clings to the best [object of] clinging; for this is the best [object of] clinging, namely, the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

"Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu is practising thus: 'It might not be, and it might not be mine; it will not be, and it will not be mine. What exists, what has come to be, that I am abandoning.' Thus he obtains equanimity. He does not delight in that equanimity, welcome it, or remain holding to it. Since he does not do so, his consciousness does not become dependent on it and does not cling to it. A bhikkhu, Ānanda, who is without clinging attains Nibbāna."

"It is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvellous! The Blessed One, indeed, has explained to us the crossing of the flood in dependence upon one support or another. But, venerable sir, what is noble liberation?"

"Here, Ānanda, a noble disciple considers thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come, material forms here and now and material forms in lives to come, perceptions of forms here and now and perceptions of forms in lives to come, perceptions of the imperturbable, perceptions of the base of nothingness, and perceptions of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception – this is personality as far as personality extends. This is the Deathless, namely, the liberation of the mind through not clinging."

"Thus, Ānanda, I have taught the way directed to the imperturbable, I have taught the way directed to the base of nothingness, I have taught the way directed to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, I have taught the crossing of the flood in dependence upon one support or another, I have taught noble liberation."

> What should be done for his disciples out of compassion by a teacher who seeks their welfare and has compassion for them, that I have done for you, Ānanda. There are these roots of trees, these empty huts. Meditate, Ānanda, do not delay, or else you will regret it later. This is our instruction to you."
> That is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Ānanda was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.
> ~ M 106.10-15 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Not only is attachment to the path abandoned at the moment of Awakening, but so is attachment to the goal.

> 15.3) He directly knows Nibbāna as Nibbāna. Having directly known Nibbāna as Nibbāna, he should not conceive [himself as] Nibbāna, he should not conceive [himself] in Nibbāna, he should not conceive [himself apart] from Nibbāna, he should not conceive Nibbāna to be 'mine,' he should not delight in Nibbāna. Why is that? So that he may fully understand it, I say.
> ~ M 1.50 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Even the appreciation for the Dhamma needs to be relinquished on approaching the final goal.

> 15.4) He turns his mind away from those phenomena, and having done so, inclines his mind to the property of deathlessness: 'This is peace, this is exquisite – the resolution of all fabrications; the relinquishment of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Nibbāna.'
> Staying right there, he reaches the ending of the mental fermentations. Or, if not , through passion and delight for this very property [of deathlessness] and from the total wasting away of the first five of the fetters [self-identity views, grasping at precepts & practices, uncertainty, sensual passion, and irritation] – he is due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.
> ~ A 9.36 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

In fact, the act of abandoning that occurs at Awakening is so radical that it can be expressed only in enigmatic terms.

> 15.5) Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. Then, when the night had advanced, a certain devatā of stunning beauty, illuminating the entire Jeta's Grove, approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage to the Blessed One, stood to one side, and said to him:
> "How, dear sir, did you cross the flood?"
> "By not halting, friend, and by not straining I crossed the flood."
> "But how is it, dear sir, that by not halting and by not straining you crossed the flood?"
> "When I came to a standstill, friend, then I sank; but when I struggled, then I got swept away. It is in this way, friend, that by not halting and by not straining I crossed the flood."
> ~ S 1.1 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The original Pali of this passage contains a paradox that is a bit difficult to render in English. Here is an alternative translation:

> "I crossed over the flood without pushing forward, without staying in place (or: unestablished)."
> "But how, dear sir, did you cross over the flood without pushing forward, without staying in place?"
> "When I pushed forward, I was whirled about. When I stayed in place, I sank. And so I crossed over the flood without pushing forward, without staying in place."
> ~ S.1.1 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

Ajahn Chah similarly has used a paradoxical way of speaking to express this point:

> 15.6) To put it another way, going forward is suffering, retreating is suffering, and stopping is suffering. Not going forward, not retreating, and not stopping... When that happens, is anything left? Body and mind cease here. This is the cessation of suffering. Hard to understand, isn't it?
> ~ Ajahn Chah, 'Food for the Heart,' p 339

Given the total nature of this letting go, does anything remain? The repeated refrains included in the descriptions of Awakening by those who have attained it

suggest at least one thing: Those who have been liberated know they have been liberated. This aspect of knowing for oneself is a characteristic of the Dhamma: paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi – to be personally experienced by the wise.

> 15.7) Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is one with taints destroyed, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and is completely liberated through final knowledge, this is the nature of his answer:
>
> "Friends, regarding the seen I abide unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. Regarding the heard... Regarding the sensed... Regarding the cognized I abide unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. It is by knowing thus, seeing thus, regarding these four kinds of expression, that through not clinging my mind is liberated from the taints...
>
> "Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is one with taints destroyed... and is completely liberated through final knowledge, this is the nature of his answer:
>
> "Friends, having known material form to be feeble, fading away, and comfortless, with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of attraction and clinging regarding material form, of mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies regarding material form, I have understood that my mind is liberated.
>
> "Friends, having known feeling... Having known perception... Having known formations... Having known consciousness to be feeble, fading away, and comfortless, with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of attraction and clinging regarding consciousness, of mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies regarding consciousness, I have understood that my mind is liberated.
>
> "It is by knowing thus, seeing thus, regarding these five aggregates affected by clinging, that through not clinging my mind is liberated from the taints."
>
> ... Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is one with taints destroyed... and is completely liberated through final knowledge, this is the nature of his answer:
>
> "Friends, I have treated the earth element as not self, with no self based on the earth element. And with the destruction, fading

away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of attraction and clinging based on the earth element, of mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies based on the earth element, I have understood that my mind is liberated.

"Friends, I have treated the water element... the fire element... the air element... the space element... the consciousness element as not self, with no self based on the consciousness element. And with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of attraction and clinging based on the consciousness element, of mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies based on the consciousness element, I have understood that my mind is liberated.

"It is by knowing thus, seeing thus, regarding these six elements, that through not clinging my mind is liberated from the taints... Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is one with taints destroyed... and is completely liberated through final knowledge, this is the nature of his answer:

"Friends, with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of desire, lust, delight, craving, attraction, and clinging, and of mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies regarding the eye, forms, eye-consciousness, and things cognizable [by the mind] through eye-consciousness, I have understood that my mind is liberated.

"With the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of desire, lust, delight, craving, attraction, and clinging, and of mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies regarding the ear, sounds, ear-consciousness, and things cognizable [by the mind] through ear-consciousness... regarding the nose, odours, nose-consciousness, and things cognizable [by the mind] through nose-consciousness... regarding the tongue, flavours, tongue-consciousness, and things cognizable [by the mind] through tongue-consciousness... regarding the body, tangibles, body-consciousness, and things cognizable [by the mind] through body-consciousness... regarding the mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and things cognizable [by the mind] through mind-consciousness, I have understood that my mind is liberated. "It is by knowing thus, seeing thus, regarding these six internal and

external bases, that through not clinging my mind is liberated from the taints."
~ M 112.4, .6, .8 & .10 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

15.8) Once the Venerable Ānanda approached the Venerable Sāriputta and asked:
"Can it be, friend Sāriputta, that a monk attains to such a concentration of mind that in earth he is not percipient of earth, nor in water is he percipient of water, nor in fire... air... the base of the infinity of space... the base of the infinity of consciousness... the base of nothingness... the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is he percipient of all these; nor is he percipient of this world or a world beyond – but yet he is percipient?"
"Yes, friend Ānanda, he can attain to such a concentration of mind."
"But how, friend Sāriputta, can a monk attain to such a concentration of mind?"
"Once, friend Ānanda, I lived here in Sāvatthi, in the Dark Forest. There I attained to such a concentration of mind that in earth I was not percipient of earth ... (as above) ... nor was I percipient of this world or a world beyond – and yet I was percipient."
"But what was the Venerable Sāriputta percipient of on that occasion?"
"'Nibbāna is cessation of becoming, Nibbāna is cessation of becoming" – one such perception arose in me and another such perception ceased. Just as, friend Ānanda, from a fire of faggots one flame arises and another flame ceases, even so, 'Nibbāna is cessation of becoming, Nibbāna is cessation of becoming' – one such perception arose in me and another such perception ceased. On that occasion, friend, I perceived that Nibbāna is the cessation of becoming."
~ A 10.7 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Further, those who have been liberated know that more work for the freeing of the mind is not necessary.

15.9) He knew: birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world.
~ A 8.30 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

> 15.10) At Sāvatthī. Then, when the night had advanced, the young deva Dāmali, of stunning beauty, illuminating the entire Jeta's Grove, approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage to the Blessed One, stood to one side, and recited this verse in the presence of the Blessed One:
>
> "This should be done by the brahmin:
> Striving without weariness,
> That by his abandoning of sensual desires
> He does not yearn for existence."
>
> "For the brahmin there is no task to be done,
> [O Dāmali," said the Blessed One],
> "For the brahmin has done what should be done.
> While he has not gained a footing in the river,
> A man will strain with all his limbs;
> But a footing gained, standing on the ground,
> He need not strain for he has gone beyond.
>
> "This is a simile for the brahmin, O Dāmali,
> For the taintless one, the discreet meditator.
> Having reached the end of birth and death,
> He need not strain for he has gone beyond."
> ~ S 2.5 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Still, those who have followed the path to the end find that spiritual qualities that were developed along the path are still available to them.

> 15.11) Then afterwards that monk trained in the training in the higher virtue, in the training in the higher mind, and in the training in the higher wisdom. As he so trained, he abandoned lust, hatred and delusion. With their abandoning he did not do anything unwholesome or resort to anything evil.
> ~ A 3.83 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 15.12) "Friend Anuruddha, your faculties are serene, your complexion is pure and bright. In what dwelling does the Venerable Anuruddha now usually dwell?"

> "Now, friend, I usually dwell with a mind well established in the four establishments of mindfulness...
> "The bhikkhu, friend, who is an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached his own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, one completely liberated through final knowledge, usually dwells with a mind well established in these four establishments of mindfulness."
> ~ S 52.9 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

In a discourse in the Majjhima Nikāya, Venerable Ānanda recounts all the many wonderful and marvellous qualities of the Buddha. He begins with the Buddha's dwelling in Tusita heaven as a Bodhisatta, immediately prior to this lifetime, and the many aspects of his miraculous conception and birth. The Buddha approves of what Ānanda has said, but concludes by saying:

> 15.13) That being so, Ānanda, remember this too as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Tathāgata: Here, Ānanda, for the Tathāgata feelings are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; perceptions are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; thoughts are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear. Remember this too, Ānanda, as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Tathāgata.
> ~ M 123.22 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

One who is either inclined to Nibbāna or who has already attained some realization tends not to be drawn into the world and its complications. The protection provided by this composure is not strained or forced, but instead has become an innate characteristic within the heart.

> 15.14) Indeed, Ānanda, it is not possible that a bhikkhu who delights in company, takes delight in company, and devotes himself to delight in company, who delights in society, takes delight in society, and rejoices in society, will ever enter upon and abide in either the deliverance of mind that is temporary and delectable or in [the deliverance of mind] that is perpetual and unshakeable. But it can be expected that when a bhikkhu lives alone, withdrawn from society, he will enter upon and abide in

> the deliverance of mind that is temporary and delectable or in [the deliverance of mind] that is perpetual and unshakeable...
> However, Ānanda, there is this abiding discovered by the Tathāgata: to enter and abide in voidness internally by giving no attention to all signs. If, while the Tathāgata is abiding thus, he is visited by bhikkhus or bhikkhunīs, by men or women lay followers, by kings or kings' ministers, by other sectarians or their disciples, then with a mind leaning to seclusion, tending and inclining to seclusion, withdrawn, delighting in renunciation, and altogether done with things that are the basis for taints, he invariably talks to them in a way concerned with dismissing them.
> Therefore, Ānanda, if a bhikkhu should wish: "May I enter upon and abide in voidness internally," he should steady his mind internally, quiet it, bring it to singleness, and concentrate it.
> ~ M 122.4, .6 & .7 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The dwelling in voidness, the perfect composure developed along the path (see also §§12.9-.21) are thus also fruits of the practice. Although these qualities may seem to resemble aloofness or coldness, the opposite is true. The Buddha drew countless beings to his presence because of his inspiring demeanour. Throughout the history of Buddhist countries, enlightened followers of the Buddha have always been a source of encouragement and the many folk have wanted to draw close to them because of the warmth of their example. Indeed, the Buddha praises those who live for the well-being of others:

> 15.15) These four kinds of persons, O monks, are found existing in the world. What four? There is one who lives for his own good but not for the good others; one who lives for the good of others but not for his own good; one who lives neither for his own good nor for the good of others; and one who lives for both his own good and for the good of others.
> [1] (4.96) And how, monks, does a person live for his own good and not for the good of others? He practises for the removal of lust, hatred and delusion in himself, but does not encourage others in the removal of lust, hatred and delusion.
> (4.99) He himself abstains from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and intoxicants, but he does not encourage others in such restraint.
> [2] (4.96) And how, monks, does a person live for the good of others

> but not for his own good? He encourages others in the removal of lust, hatred and delusion, but he himself does not practise for their removal.
> (4.99) He encourages others in abstention from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and intoxicants, but he himself does not practise such restraint.
> [3] (4.96) And how, monks, does a person live neither for his own good nor for the good of others? He neither practises for the removal of lust, hatred and delusion himself, nor does he encourage others to do so.
> (4.99) He neither practises abstention from killing and so forth himself, nor does he encourage others in such restraint.
> [4] (4.96) And how, monks, does a person live both for his own good and for the good of others? He himself practises for the removal of lust, hatred and delusion, and also encourages others to do so.
> (4.99) He himself practises abstention from killing and so forth, and also encourages others in such restraint.
> ~ A 4.96 & .99 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

In this way, the practice aimed at the attainment of Nibbāna can be an act of compassion both for ourselves and for those who are inspired by our example to undertake the practice for themselves.

> 15.16) Thus, bhikkhus, I have taught you the unconditioned and the path leading to the unconditioned. Whatever should be done, bhikkhus, by a compassionate teacher out of compassion for his disciples, desiring their welfare, that I have done for you. These are the feet of trees, bhikkhus, these are empty huts. Meditate, bhikkhus, do not be negligent, lest you regret it later. This is our instruction to you.
> ~ S 43.1 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

16

SOTĀPANNA: THE SPIRITUAL TURNING POINT I

Entering the stream

> 16.1) BHIKKHUS, SUPPOSE THERE WERE A MAN with a life span of a hundred years, who could live a hundred years. Someone would say to him: "Come, good man, in the morning they will strike you with a hundred spears; at noon they will strike you with a hundred spears; in the evening they will strike you with a hundred spears. And you, good man, being struck day after day by three hundred spears will have a life span of a hundred years, will live a hundred years; and then, after a hundred years have passed, you will make the breakthrough to the Four Noble Truths, to which you had not broken through earlier."
>
> It is fitting, bhikkhus, for a clansman intent on his good to accept the offer. For what reason? Because this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning; a first point cannot be discerned of blows by spears, blows by swords, blows by axes. And even though this may be so, bhikkhus, I do not say that the breakthrough to the Four Noble Truths is accompanied by suffering or displeasure. Rather, the breakthrough to the Four Noble Truths is accompanied only by happiness and joy.
>
> ~ S 56.35 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

It would be useful now to direct our attention to the fruits of the training. The above image vividly displays the urgent necessity of realizing the Dhamma. The 'breakthrough to the Four Noble Truths' is usually equated with the entering of the stream of Dhamma (sotāpatti).

> 16.2) When he saw that Yasa's mind was ready, receptive,

> free from hindrance, eager and trustful, he expounded to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. Just as a clean cloth with all marks removed would take dye evenly, so too while Yasa sat there the spotless, immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose in him: All that is subject to arising is subject to cessation.
> ~ MV 1.7 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli trans.)

Although Nibbāna is the highest and most worthy goal for one practising the Buddha's teachings, the thought of ever attaining the sublime nature of that goal can appear daunting. So, to show the point of access to that goal, it is often a useful exercise to contemplate the first level of realization: stream-entry. This helps to provide a clearer sense of what needs to be done in the first stage of the practice, and to provide a reminder of the practice's positive and attainable fruits.

Therefore exploring the various facets and aspects of stream-entry should be a fruitful endeavour as there tends to be little talk about or discussion of this 'lowly' attainment, which often lives in the shadow of complete realization: Nibbāna – arahantship.

Particularly in a modern Western culture, inundated by advertising and the overstimulation of the consumption ethic, the mind can be constantly searching for anything with a superlative prefacing it – the ultimate, the perfect, the refined, the exquisite. If this is the case in our spiritual aspirations, we will tend to overlook the foundations when trying to reach the ultimate too quickly. This impatience can easily lead to frustration and a feeling that the goal is impossible to attain. So reflecting on stream-entry can play a very important role, especially in that it allows us to see what can be incorporated into our daily lives and practice.

A sotāpanna is one who has reached the first stage of liberation (stream-entry – sotāpatti). The early commentators emphasized that the stream-enterer had a first taste of Nibbāna and the motivation arising from that initial realization would, without a doubt, provide the impetus that would carry the aspirant on to the final goal. After one has realized stream-entry, one's full awakening is assured in not more than seven lifetimes. This is nothing to be looked down upon. Stream-enterers will not be reborn in any of the lower realms; they will at least be born in the human realm or higher. This is a great blessing.

The ultimate goal of the teachings is not a one-shot affair – either you get it or you miss it completely and are forever out of luck. There is a progressive maturing of insight into the nature of the goal that leads the practitioner to relinquish the obstructions blocking realization and to fulfill the qualities commensurate with realization.

A good example of this is the account of the Buddha teaching his first five disciples. With this teaching, Kondañña was able to understand and realize stream-entry. Over the following days, the Buddha continued to instruct the five until they had all entered the stream. Then, on hearing the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta – the Discourse on the Characteristics of Not-self – they all were fully freed (MV 1.6).

Although some people may be quicker than others in reaching the goal, the structure of the unfolding insight is common to all. The most familiar description of the stages of realization contains four levels: the stream-enterer (sotāpanna), once-returner (sakadāgāmi), non-returner (anāgāmi) and one fully enlightened (arahant). These levels are differentiated according to the 'fetters' (saṃyojana) that a liberated person relinquishes at each stage:

> 16.3) Bhikkhus, there are these five lower fetters. What five? Identity view, doubt, the distorted grasp of rules and vows, sensual desire, ill will. These are the five lower fetters.
> ~ S 45.179 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 16.4) Bhikkhus, there are these five higher fetters. What five? Lust for form, lust for the formless, conceit, restlessness, ignorance. These are the five higher fetters.
> ~ S 45.180 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 16.5) In this Sangha of bhikkhus there are bhikkhus who are arahants with taints destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and are completely liberated through final knowledge...
> In this Sangha of bhikkhus there are bhikkhus who, with the destruction of the five lower fetters, are due to reappear spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes] and there attain final Nibbāna, without ever returning from that world...
> In this Sangha of bhikkhus there are bhikkhus who, with the destruction of three fetters and with the attenuation of lust, hate, and delusion, are once-returners: returning once to this world to make an end of suffering...
> In this Sangha of bhikkhus there are bhikkhus who, with the destruction of the three fetters, are stream-enterers, no longer

> subject to perdition, bound [for deliverance], headed for enlightenment…
> ~ M 118.9-12 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The number of stream-enterers in the Buddha's time was relatively large.

> 16.6) "In the presence of the Blessed One, friends, I heard and learnt this: 'Bhikkhus, those bhikkhus are few who, by the destruction of the taints, in this very life enter and dwell in the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, realizing it for themselves with direct knowledge. Those bhikkhus are more numerous who, with the utter destruction of the five lower fetters, have become of spontaneous birth, due to attain Nibbāna there without returning from that world.'
> "Further, friends, in the presence of the Blessed One I heard and learnt this: 'Bhikkhus, those bhikkhus are few who… have become of spontaneous birth… Those bhikkhus are more numerous who, with the utter destruction of three fetters and with the diminishing of greed, hatred, and delusion, have become once-returners who, after coming back to this world only one more time, will make an end to suffering.'
> "Further, friends, in the presence of the Blessed One I heard and learnt this: 'Those bhikkhus are few who… have become once-returners… Those bhikkhus are more numerous who, with the utter destruction of three fetters, have become stream-enterers, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as their destination.'"
> ~ S 55.52 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

A few inferences can be drawn from the brief introduction to this next sutta. One is that the attainments are not so formidable and daunting that lay-people living within society were not able to become anāgāmis, sakadāgāmis, and sotāpannas. It is also noteworthy to look at the numbers and see that there are almost twice as many once-returners as non-returners; and more than five times as many stream-winners as once-returners.

> 16.7) Thus have I heard. Once the Lord was staying at Nādika at the Brick House. And at that time the Lord was explaining the

> rebirths of various devotees up and down the country who had died and passed away: Kāsis and Kosalans, Vajjians and Mallas, Cetis and Vaṃsas, Kurus and Pañcālas, Macchas and Sūrasenas, saying: "This one was reborn there, and that one there. More than fifty Nādikan devotees, having abandoned the five lower fetters, were reborn spontaneously and would attain Nibbāna without returning to this world; over ninety of them, having abandoned three fetters and weakened greed, hatred and delusion, were Once-Returners, who would return to this world once more and then make an end of suffering; and more than five hundred, having abandoned three fetters, were Stream-Winners, incapable of falling into states of woe, certain of Nibbāna."
> ~ D 18.1 (Maurice Walshe trans.)

ENTERING THE STREAM

In this section we will look at the various attributes leading to stream-entry. A picture will emerge that allows us to recognize stream-entry as accessible, practical and desirable. The mind will then be enabled to incorporate stream-entry into its view and to let it define the direction of aspiration, allowing the heart's desire for freedom to be fulfilled.

The following sutta gives a sense both of what someone does to become a sotāpanna and of what it means to be a sotāpanna:

> 16.8) Then the Venerable Sāriputta approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. The Blessed One then said to him:
> "Sāriputta, this is said: 'A factor for stream-entry, a factor for stream-entry.' What now, Sāriputta, is a factor for stream-entry?"
> "Association with superior persons, venerable sir, is a factor for stream-entry. Hearing the true Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry. Careful attention is a factor for stream-entry. Practice in accordance with the Dhamma is a factor for stream entry."
> "Good, good, Sāriputta! Association with superior persons, Sāriputta, is a factor for stream-entry. Hearing the true Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry. Careful attention is a factor for stream-entry. Practice in accordance with the Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry."

> "Sāriputta, this is said: 'The stream, the stream.' What now, Sāriputta, is the stream?"
> "This Noble Eightfold Path, venerable sir, is the stream; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration."
> "Good, good, Sāriputta! This Noble Eightfold Path is the stream; that is, right view… right concentration.
> "Sāriputta, this is said: 'A stream-enterer, a stream-enterer.' What now, Sāriputta, is a stream-enterer?"
> "One who possesses this Noble Eightfold Path, venerable sir, is called a stream-enterer: this venerable one of such a name and clan."
> "Good, good, Sāriputta! One who possesses this Noble Eightfold Path is a stream-enterer: this venerable one of such a name and clan."
> ~ S 55.5 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The four factors for stream-entry are an extremely useful framework for our investigation. One who desires to experience the stream of truth would need to develop these factors. They form the foundation for what is wholesome and are conjoined with understanding.

The first factor – association with superior persons (sappurisasaṃseva) – allows one to have contact with examples of righteousness and sagacity. This association leads one on to following that same example.

> 16.9) Monks, when you put your trust in a superior person you can expect the following four benefits: growth in noble morality, growth in noble concentration, growth in noble wisdom, and growth in noble release.
> ~ A 4.240

> 16.10) A man who wraps rotting fish
> in a blade of kusa grass
> makes the grass smelly:
> so it is
> if you seek out fools.
> But a man who wraps powdered incense
> in the leaf of a tree
> makes the leaf fragrant:

> so it is
> if you seek out
> the enlightened.
> ~ Iti 76 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

This next example from the suttas concerns Mahānāma the Sakyan. There is no explicit mention here of Mahānāma being a sotāpanna, but other suttas praise him as having entered the stream of Dhamma. He maintained his association with both the Buddha and the Sangha, and was sincere in his practice. What is also worthy of note here is that, in addition to the above mentioned factors for stream-entry, a stream-enterer relies on the ariyavuddhi dhammas as the foundation of conduct – conditions conducive to noble growth (that is, faith, virtue, learning, generosity, wisdom). As one has contact with teachers and good examples, the path of training is entered into and lived fully.

> 16.11) Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in Nigrodha's Park. Then Mahānāma the Sakyan approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him:
> "Venerable sir, this Kapilavatthu is rich and prosperous, populous, crowded, with congested thoroughfares. In the evening, when I am entering Kapilavatthu after visiting the Blessed One or the bhikkhus worthy of esteem, I come across a stray elephant, a stray horse, a stray chariot, a stray cart, a stray man. On that occasion, venerable sir, my mindfulness regarding the Blessed One becomes muddled, my mindfulness regarding the Dhamma becomes muddled, my mindfulness regarding the Sangha becomes muddled. The thought then occurs to me: 'If at this moment I should die, what would be my destination, what would be my future bourn?'"
> "Don't be afraid, Mahānāma! Don't be afraid, Mahānāma! Your death will not be a bad one, your demise will not be a bad one. When a person's mind has been fortified over a long time by faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom, right here crows, vultures, hawks, dogs, jackals, or various creatures eat his body, consisting of form, composed of the four great elements, originating from mother and father, built up out of rice and gruel, subject to impermanence, to being worn and rubbed away, to breaking apart and dispersal. But his mind, which has been fortified over a long

> time by faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom – that goes upwards, goes to distinction.
> "Suppose, Mahānāma, a man submerges a pot of ghee or a pot of oil in a deep pool of water and breaks it. All of its shards and fragments would sink downwards, but the ghee or oil there would rise upwards. So too, Mahānāma, when a person's mind has been fortified over a long time by faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom, right here crows... or various creatures eat his body... But his mind which has been fortified over a long time by faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom – that goes upwards, goes to distinction.
> "Don't be afraid, Mahānāma! Don't be afraid, Mahānāma! Your death will not be a bad one, your demise will not be a bad one."
> ~ S 55.21 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The second factor for stream-entry, hearing the true Dhamma (saddhammassavana), is central to realization. The Canon describes numerous occasions when people, whether lay or monastic, attained stream-entry through hearing the teachings. The following is an excellent example, in that it comes after the Buddha gives a graduated discourse. These are rather stock phrases in the Pali and appear many times through the Canon, but it is the first time they appear in the Sutta Piṭaka:

> 16.12) And as Pokkharasāti sat there, the Lord delivered a graduated discourse on generosity, on morality and on heaven, showing the danger, degradation and corruption of sense-desires, and the profit of renunciation. And when the Lord knew that Pokkharasāti's mind was ready, pliable, free from the hindrances, joyful and calm, then he preached a sermon on Dhamma in brief: on suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. And just as a clean cloth from which all stains have been removed receives the dye perfectly, so in the Brahmin Pokkharasāti, as he sat there, there arose the pure and spotless Dhamma-eye, and he knew: "Whatever things have an origin must come to cessation." And Pokkharasāti, having seen, attained, experienced and penetrated the Dhamma, having passed beyond doubt, transcended uncertainty, having gained perfect confidence in the Teacher's doctrine without relying on others, said: "Excellent, Lord, excellent! It is as if someone were to set up what had been

> knocked down, or to point out the way to one who had got lost, or to bring an oil-lamp into a dark place, so that those with eyes could see what was there. Just so the Blessed Lord has expounded the Dhamma in various ways... I go with my son, my wife, my ministers and counsellors for refuge to the Reverend Gotama, to the Dhamma and to the Sangha. May the Reverend Gotama accept me as a lay-follower who has taken refuge from this day forth as long as life shall last!"
> ~ D 3.2.21-22 (Maurice Walshe trans.)

The third factor for stream-entry is careful attention (yoniso-manisakāra). This term can be translated in many ways – wise consideration, skillful reflection, clear thinking, appropriate attention, keen application of mind. The importance of this element in the development of the qualities useful for understanding and penetrating truth cannot be underestimated.

> 16.13) Bhikkhus, this is the forerunner and precursor of the rising of the sun, that is, the dawn. So too, bhikkhus, for a bhikkhu this is the forerunner and precursor for the arising of the Noble Eightfold Path, that is... accomplishment in careful attention. When a bhikkhu is accomplished in careful attention, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate this Noble Eightfold Path.
> ~ S 45.55 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 16.14) Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of the taints is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and see. Who knows and sees what? Wise attention and unwise attention. When one attends unwisely, unarisen taints arise and arisen taints increase. When one attends wisely, unarisen taints do not arise and arisen taints are abandoned...
> Bhikkhus, a well-taught noble disciple, who has regard for noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, who has regard for true men and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, understands what things are fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. Since that is so, he does not attend to those things unfit for attention and he attends to those things fit for attention. What are the things unfit for attention that he does not attend to? They are things such that when he attends to

them, the unarisen taint of sensual desire arises in him and the arisen taint of sensual desire increases, the unarisen taint of being arises in him and the arisen taint of being increases, the unarisen taint of ignorance arises in him and the arisen taint of ignorance increases. These are the things unfit for attention that he does not attend to. And what are the things fit for attention that he attends to? They are things such that when he attends to them, the unarisen taint of sensual desire does not arise in him and the arisen taint of sensual desire is abandoned, the unarisen taint of being does not arise in him and the arisen taint of being is abandoned, the unarisen taint of ignorance does not arise in him and the arisen taint of ignorance is abandoned.
He attends wisely: "This is suffering;" he attends wisely: "This is the origin of suffering;" he attends wisely: "This is the cessation of suffering;" he attends wisely: "This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering." When he attends wisely in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: personality view, doubt, and adherence to rules and observances. These are called the taints that should be abandoned by seeing.
~ M 2.3 & .9-11 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

16.15) MahāKoṭṭhita: "Sāriputta my friend, which things should a virtuous monk attend to in an appropriate way?"
Sāriputta: "A virtuous monk, Koṭṭhita my friend, should attend in an appropriate way to the five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. Which five? Form as a clinging-aggregate, feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness as a clinging-aggregate. A virtuous monk should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a virtuous monk, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant... not-self, would realize the fruit of stream-entry."
~ S 22.122 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

The significance of yoniso-manisakāra can be seen more clearly in this next passage. The mind's ability to reflect on and consider the true nature of things

affects its ability to penetrate the Dhamma. Particularly, if the heart perceives Nibbāna as something unsatisfactory, it would not conceive the desire to realize it as a goal.

This capacity of the human mind to miss what is important by not paying appropriate attention is quite ordinary – and it has troublesome consequences.

> 16.16) Truly, O monks, that a monk who considers any formation as permanent… any formation as pleasant… anything as a self… who considers Nibbāna as suffering, can have a conviction that conforms with the Dhamma, that cannot be; and that one who is without a conviction that conforms with the Dhamma should enter into the certainty of rightness, that too cannot be; and that one who has not entered into the certainty of rightness should realize the fruits of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning or arahantship, that too cannot be.
> ~ A 6.98 & .101 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The fourth and final factor for stream-entry is dhammānudhamma-paṭipatti. This is usually translated as 'practice in accordance with the Dhamma,' but it can have some other subtle nuances, such as practising Dhamma appropriately according to the truth. There are many ways of practice but some of them may, in actuality, not accord with the teachings or the true Way. They may be popular or comfortable, but yet not be Dhamma. For practice to yield results, it must conform to truth or correct principle.

Another nuance which could be teased out of the phrase dhammānu-dhammapaṭipatti is 'practising in perfect accord with all levels and aspects of the Dhamma.' That is, in the context of a gradual practice, there is the need to attend to fulfilling the foundations before going on to subsequent practices. To accord with Dhamma doesn't necessarily mean that one has to wait for perfect virtue before beginning to meditate. A common teaching, both in the Canon and in the forest tradition, points out how wisdom fosters virtue and concentration. This still accords with the principles of Dhamma, but is not necessarily following the linear route. Another meaning for the phrase is making sure one follows the Dhamma as one has studied it, rather than studying one thing and then practising in a completely different manner.

> 16.17) If a monk practises for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, & cessation with regard to aging & death… birth…

> becoming... clinging/sustenance ... craving... feeling... contact... the six sense media... name & form... consciousness... fabrications... ignorance, he deserves to be called a monk who practises the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma.
> ~ S 12.67 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

One way that accords with Dhamma is the relinquishing of stinginess. A sotāpanna's generosity is deeply ingrained in the heart; it does not need to be thought through. It has brought about the need for rules to be laid down in the Vinaya (the Monastic Code) to protect those lay sekha, (literally, 'ones in training,' but referring to at least stream-enterers, and also once-returners and non-returners) whose means were diminishing, but faith increasing. They would tend to be overly generous and the Buddha felt it necessary for the Sangha to be alert to their needs as well.

'Macchariya' is the Pali word used here which is defined in the dictionary as avarice, stinginess, selfishness, envy; one of the principal evil passions and the main cause of rebirth in the petaloka (the realm of the hungry ghosts).

> 16.18) Monks, unless one abandons these five things, one cannot realize the fruit of stream-winning. What five? Stinginess as to one's lodging, family, gains, fame and Dhamma. Truly, monks, there are these five; now the meanest of these five, monks, is this: stinginess as to Dhamma.
> ~ A 5.260

Stinginess as to Dhamma means jealously guarding one's knowledge and understanding to the point where one is unwilling to freely teach or pass it on. The deep generosity of a stream-enterer's heart makes it impossible to be possessive of one's insights or experience – or to be worried that someone may be in competition with oneself. It is very inspiring to observe the selflessness of realized teachers who are always willing to share the teachings and their guidance with others. The following example shows how virtuous conduct and on-going training in accord with Dhamma are necessary factors for realizing sotāpatti (stream-entry).

> 16.19) Bhikkhus, dwell possessed of virtue, possessed of the Pāṭimokkha, restrained with the restraint of the Pāṭimokkha, perfect in conduct and resort, and seeing fear in the slightest fault, train by undertaking the training precepts.

> If a bhikkhu should wish: "May I be dear and agreeable to my companions in the holy life, respected and esteemed by them," let him fulfill the precepts, be devoted to internal serenity of mind, not neglect meditation, be possessed of insight, and dwell in empty huts.

The Buddha then continues to describe various ways in which the precepts bring benefit, such as being a source of merit for those who give support, relinquishing unwholesome mental qualities, entering the jhānas, and many other higher attainments including:

> If a bhikkhu should wish: "May I, with the destruction of three fetters, become a stream-enterer, no longer subject to perdition, bound [for deliverance], headed for enlightenment," let him fulfil the precepts, be devoted to internal serenity of mind, not neglect meditaton, be possessed of insight, and dwell in empty huts.
> ~ M 6.2-3 & .11 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

This next passage is an example of the results of not practising in accordance with the Dhamma. King Ajātasattu was obstructed in his ability to realize stream-entry even when listening to Dhamma directly from the Buddha, due to his being a parricide. "His fate is sealed" means that due to his actions he is irreconcilably destined to a very long stay in the lowest hell realm.

> 16.20) Then King Ajātasattu, rejoicing and delighting at these words, rose from his seat, saluted the Lord, and departed with his right side towards him.
> As soon as the King had gone, the Lord said: "The King is done for, his fate is sealed, monks! But if the King had not deprived his father, that good man and just king, of his life, then as he sat here the pure and spotless Dhamma-eye would have arisen in him."
> ~ D 2.101-2 (Maurice Walshe trans.)

The Eightfold Path which is equated with the stream is often characterized as being composed of three trainings – virtue, concentration (or the higher mind) and wisdom. In this next example there is a relationship drawn between the trainings and the penetration of the goal. If the factors of the path are fulfilled

partially, one is able to realize stream-entry. If you fulfill them more completely, you'll reach the higher attainments. For stream-entry, full accomplishment in virtue is necessary, but only partial accomplishment in concentration and wisdom.

> 16.21) O monks, the more than a hundred and fifty training rules that come up for recitation every fortnight, in which young men desiring the goal train themselves, are all contained in these three trainings. What three? The training in the higher virtue, the training in the higher mind, and the training in the higher wisdom. These are the three trainings in which the more than a hundred and fifty training rules are all contained.
> Here, monks, a monk is one fully accomplished in virtue but only moderately accomplished in concentration and wisdom. He infringes some of the lesser and minor training rules and rehabilitates himself. Why is that? Because, monks, this is not said to be impossible for him. But as to those training rules that are fundamental to the holy life, in conformity with the holy life, in these his virtue is stable and steady, and he trains himself in the training rules he has undertaken. With the utter destruction of three fetters he becomes a stream-enterer, one no longer subject to rebirth in a lower world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination.

Then there are comparable sections for the sakadāgāmi, anāgāmi and arahant with increasing refinement, according to the fetters relinquished as explained in the suttas quoted at §16.3, .4 & .5.

> Thus, monks, one who is partly accomplished achieves partial success; one who is fully accomplished achieves full success. But these training rules are not barren, I declare.
> ~ A 3.85 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

A partial accomplishment in concentration and wisdom is still enough to take one to a clear vision of the Dhamma. Even a partial attainment, that is, stream-entry, is sufficient to lay the foundation for understanding the true nature of things and to begin to realize the transcendent fruits of practice. An example of this is when Sāriputta first received a brief teaching from Assaji, one of the original five disciples of the Buddha:

> 16.22) Now when the wanderer Sāriputta heard this statement of the Dhamma, the spotless, immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose in him: All that is subject to arising is subject to cessation. ... Sāriputta went to Moggallāna the wanderer. Moggallāna the wanderer saw him coming. He said: "Your faculties are serene, friend, the colour of your skin is clear and bright. Is it possible that you have found the Deathless?" "Yes, friend, I have found the Deathless."
> ~ MV 1.23 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli trans.)

This seeing of the Deathless is the 'uncommon knowledge' mentioned in §19.11 and it is an essential aspect to the sotāpatti experience. Insight into the nature of the goal gives one the confidence and clarity to practise correctly as one's vision is now unclouded.

> 16.23) "Friend Saviṭṭha, apart from faith, apart from personal preference, apart from oral tradition, apart from reasoned reflection, apart from acceptance of a view after pondering it, I know this, I see this: 'Nibbāna is the cessation of becoming.'"
> "Then the Venerable Nārada is an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed."
> "Friend, though I have clearly seen as it really is with correct wisdom, 'Nibbāna is the cessation of becoming,' I am not an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed. Suppose, friend, there was a well along a desert road, but it had neither a rope nor a bucket. Then a man would come along, oppressed and afflicted by the heat, tired, parched, and thirsty. He would look down into the well and the knowledge would occur to him, 'There is water,' but he would not be able to make bodily contact with it. So too, friend, though I have clearly seen as it really is with correct wisdom, 'Nibbāna is the cessation of becoming,' I am not an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed."
> ~ S 12.68

17

SOTĀPANNA: THE SPIRITUAL TURNING POINT II

WHAT IS SEEN

THE MOMENT OF STREAM-ENTRY IS OFTEN CALLED THE ARISING of the Dhamma-eye. In light of the analogy at the end of the last chapter, what is it that is seen at the bottom of the well?

> 17.1) And just as a clean cloth from which all stains have been removed receives the dye perfectly, so in the Brahmin Kūṭadanta, as he sat there, there arose the pure and spotless Dhamma-eye, and he knew: "Whatever things have an origin must come to cessation." Then Kūṭadanta, having seen, attained, experienced and penetrated the Dhamma, having passed beyond doubt, transcended uncertainty, having gained perfect confidence in the Teacher's doctrine without relying on others.
> ~ D 5.29-30 (Maurice Walshe trans.)

There are a few different ways of phrasing this experience in the discourses, but this is probably the most common. Because it is so prevalent as a description, we should look at other translations of the same verse. Different translators are able to highlight different aspects of the same material; moreover, when considering such an important concept as the entering of the stream of Dhamma it can be particularly useful to view things from another angle.

> 17.2) Just as a clean cloth with all marks removed would take dye evenly, so too, while the householder Upāli sat there, the spotless immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose in him: "All that is subject to arising is subject to cessation." Then the householder Upāli saw the Dhamma, attained the Dhamma, understood the

> Dhamma, fathomed the Dhamma; he crossed beyond doubt, did away with perplexity, gained intrepidity, and became independent of others in the Teacher's Dispensation.
> ~ M 56.18 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 17.3) To Upāli the householder, as he was sitting right there, there arose the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation. Then – having seen the Dhamma, having reached the Dhamma, known the Dhamma, reached a footing in the Dhamma, having crossed over & beyond doubt, having had no more questioning – Upāli the householder gained fearlessness and was independent of others with regard to the Teacher's message.
> ~ M 56.18 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

Here, the key factor in turning away from the stream of the world and entering the stream of Dhamma is the insight into impermanence, along with the seeing of a causal connection between all phenomena. We can recognize that seeing the truth of "All that is subject to arising is subject to cessation," is not beyond our own or anybody else's capabilities. Having made this point, the discourse goes on to describe the results, the first being the transcending of doubt and uncertainty.

Due to the different nature of the English and Pali languages, there are difficulties in translation that may obscure crucial aspects of the Dhamma. If we translate the stream-entry vision literally from Pali, we have something like 'whatever arising-dhamma cessation-dhamma.' This is terrible English but beautiful insight. English grammar requires subject and verb. Thus 'something' arises and ceases. Hence 'dhamma' comes across as a thing, or an attribute of things. A thing has existence in time, so whatever thing arises, or is subject to arising, subsequently ceases. This is not really news to the reflective mind. However if we consider stream-entry as something profound, it would be useful to consider the experience to be one in which the very process that brings 'things' to awareness is seen into. That is, the mind is experiencing an 'event-stream' dynamic of arising and ceasing that rules out substantiality.

It is like writing in water – the experience is of arising and ceasing occupying the same time frame. In this light, perhaps a better rendering would be 'Whatever is experienced as arising, is experienced as ceasing'; or 'Any experience of arising is an experience of ceasing,' the enigmatic ring of which may alert the reader to the profundity of the experience.

This would also result in a direct understanding of dependent arising: that is of a reality not of things existing in a void, but a dynamic of forces, currents and tendencies. There is no void. The 'unconditioned dhamma' some texts allude to is the experience of an awareness that doesn't support or give rise to conditions.

Seeing the true nature of phenomena in this way with penetrative insight opens the heart to seeing beyond the phenomena to knowledge of liberation.

> 17.4) First, Susīma, comes knowledge of the stability of the Dhamma, afterwards knowledge of Nibbāna.
> ~ S 12.70 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Human life is often characterized by the uncertainty of what is 'truly' good or 'truly' right. There are many pundits and experts willing to expound their views, and many people are willing to try to believe them, but, still... doubts linger. Stream-enterers have gained confidence in the Buddha's doctrine not because they are trying to believe, or are forced to believe, but because they have seen for themselves. The independence and freedom of not having to rely on others is precious. It is not arrived at through a stubborn and rigid upholding of a view or position, but through a clear penetration of direct experience through the light of discernment.

In order for the mind to penetrate truth, seeing will accord with right view. The view in accordance with Dhamma is the dominant factor in facilitating a clear penetration. The Buddha praises and encourages right view in many places in the Canon. Here is just one example.

> 17.5) Bhikkhus, suppose a spike of rice or a spike of barley were rightly directed and were pressed upon by the hand or the foot. That it could pierce the hand or the foot and draw blood: this is possible. For what reason? Because the spike is rightly directed. So too, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu with a rightly directed view, with a rightly directed development of the path, could pierce ignorance, arouse true knowledge, and realize Nibbāna: this is possible. For what reason? Because his view is rightly directed.
> And how does a bhikkhu do so? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu develops right view, which is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. He develops... right concentration, which is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release.

> It is in this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu with a rightly directed view, with a rightly directed development of the path, pierces ignorance, arouses true knowledge, and realizes Nibbāna.
> ~ S 45.9 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Right view is commonly explained in terms of the Four Noble Truths, and as the following passage makes clear, the stream-enterer has had a direct vision of these truths.

> 17.6) Bhikkhus, for a noble disciple, a person accomplished in view (diṭṭhisampanna = sotāpanna) who has made the breakthrough... is one who understands as it really is: 'This is suffering.' 'This is the origination of suffering,' 'This is the cessation of suffering,' 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.'
> ~ S 56.51 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The Buddha also defines right view in terms of dependent origination. An understanding of conditionality is alluded to in the first quote in this chapter – "Whatever things have an origin must come to cessation." This forms a basis for insight into the true nature of phenomena that allows the heart to enter the stream. It is interesting how dependent origination and the structure of the Four Noble Truths are intertwined in the following sutta:

> 17.7) When, bhikkhus, a noble disciple thus understands the condition; thus understands the origin of the condition; thus understands the cessation of the condition; thus understands the way leading to the cessation of the condition, he is then called a noble disciple who is accomplished in view, accomplished in vision, who has arrived at this true Dhamma, who sees this true Dhamma, who possesses a trainee's knowledge, a trainee's true knowledge, who has entered the stream of the Dhamma, a noble one with penetrative wisdom, one who stands squarely before the door to the Deathless.
> ~ S 12.27 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The Buddha makes clear that the stream-enterer's knowledge of dependent origination is direct and intuitive, rather than intellectual or rational,

learned from books, memorized from others, or arrived at through speculative thinking.

> 17.8) Bhikkhus, an instructed noble disciple does not think: "When what exists does what come to be? With the arising of what does what arise? [When what exists do volitional formations come to be? When what exists does consciousness come to be?] When what exists does name-and-form come to be?... When what exists does aging-and-death come to be?"
> Rather, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple has knowledge about this that is independent of others: "When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. [When there is ignorance, volitional formations come to be. When there are volitional formations, consciousness comes to be.] When there is consciousness, name-and-form comes to be... When there is birth, aging-and-death comes to be." He understands thus: "In such a way the world originates."
> Bhikkhus, an instructed noble disciple does not think: "When what does not exist does what not come to be? With the cessation of what does what cease? [When what does not exist do volitional formations not come to be? When what does not exist does consciousness not come to be?] When what does not exist does name-and-form not come to be?... When what does not exist does aging-and-death not come to be?"
> Rather, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple has knowledge about this that is independent of others: "When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases. [When there is no ignorance, volitional formations do not come to be. When there are no volitional formations, consciousness does not come to be.] When there is no consciousness, name-and-form does not come to be... When there is no birth, aging-and-death does not come to be." He understands thus: "In such a way the world ceases."
> Bhikkhus, when a noble disciple thus understands as they really are the origin and the passing away of the world, he is then called a noble disciple who is accomplished in view, accomplished in vision, who has arrived at this true Dhamma, who sees this true Dhamma, who possesses a trainee's knowledge, a

> trainee's true knowledge, who has entered the stream of the Dhamma, a noble one with penetrative wisdom, one who stands squarely before the door to the Deathless.
> ~ S 12.49 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Here is another perspective to the insight of a sotāpanna:

> 17.9) Bhikkhus, there are these five aggregates subject to clinging. What five? The form aggregate subject to clinging... feeling... perception... mental formations... the consciousness aggregate subject to clinging.
> When, bhikkhus, a noble disciple understands as they really are the origin and the passing away, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these five aggregates subject to clinging, then he is called a noble disciple who is a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination.
> ~ S 22.109 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

This following sutta shows what leads to the insight and realization of a sotāpanna – what lays the foundation; that is, either faith in or the understanding of the true nature of our interface with the world. There are further suttas in this section that use the same format but they focus on the objects of the senses, the feelings that arise from contact, etc. as well as the five khandhas.

The power of turning the mind toward the impermanence of phenomena, and what the mind is therefore capable of accomplishing through that contemplation, is most worthy of attention. It is something that, although based on what is truly ordinary, has extraordinary possibilities. In this next passage, the categories of faith-follower and wisdom-follower are introduced. This is another way that the Buddha describes one who enters into the stream.

> 17.10) Bhikkhus, the eye is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise. The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body... The mind is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise. One who places faith in these teachings and resolves on them thus is called a faith-follower, one who has entered the fixed course of rightness, entered the plane of superior persons, transcended the plane of the worldlings. He is incapable of doing any deed by reason of which he might be reborn in hell, in the animal realm,

> or in the domain of ghosts; he is incapable of passing away without having realized the fruit of stream-entry.
> One for whom these teachings are accepted thus after being pondered to a sufficient degree with wisdom is called a Dhamma-follower, one who has entered the fixed course of rightness, entered the plane of superior persons, transcended the plane of the worldlings. He is incapable of doing any deed by reason of which he might be reborn in hell, in the animal realm, or in the domain of ghosts; he is incapable of passing away without having realized the fruit of stream-entry.
> One who knows and sees these teachings thus is called a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination.
> ~ S 25.1 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Yet another way of viewing the qualities of sotāpannas is in terms of their spiritual faculties:

> 17.11) Bhikkhus, there are these five faculties. What five? The faculty of faith, the faculty of energy, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, the faculty of wisdom.
> When, bhikkhus, a noble disciple understands as they really are the origin and the passing away, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these five faculties, then he is called a noble disciple who is a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination.
> ~ S 48.3 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Impermanence is one of the main entry points into the Dhamma. When it is seen deeply and profoundly, the heart has the opportunity to shed its habitual confusions and abide in clear vision instead. This leads naturally to steadfastness and firmness, which is different from the surrounding world. In the following sutta, the Buddha describes the instability and change that takes place to the point at which the world disintegrates. Even in the face of such destruction, however, one who has entered the stream of Dhamma would be unshaken and reflective.

> 17.12) Thus have I heard: Once the Exalted One was dwelling in Ambapālī's Grove, near Vesālī. There the Exalted One

> addressed the monks, saying: "Monks!"
> "Lord!" they replied. And the Exalted One said:
> "Impermanent, monks, are compounded things. Unstable, monks, are compounded things. Insecure, monks, are compounded things. So, monks, be disenchanted with all things of this world, be repelled by them, be utterly free from them."

The Buddha then goes into a description of the conception of the world at that time that Mount Sineru was huge and that it was surrounded by great oceans. There would be a time when there would be no rain and all existence would suffer. Then the Buddha goes on to describe that two, three… up to seven suns would appear and things would alter and change in the world, and that we should be disenchanted with the conditions of the world. Only a person who has entered the stream of Dhamma would be able to see this clearly.

> "Now, where is the sage, where is the believer, who thinks: 'This great earth and Mount Sineru will be burnt up, will utterly perish and be no more' – save among those who have seen Nibbāna (diṭṭhapadā)."
> ~ A 7.62

18

SOTĀPANNA: THE SPIRITUAL TURNING POINT III

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

WITH THE ARISING OF THE DHAMMA-EYE AND THE SEEING of the Deathless, the mind drops its attachment to the first three of the ten fetters (saṃyojana): identity view (sakkāyadiṭṭhi), doubt (vicikicchā) and the distorted grasp of rules and vows (sīlabbataparāmāsa).

A clear description of identity/personality view comes in the dialogue between the arahant bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā and the layman Visākha, her former husband:

> 18.1) "Lady, how does identity view come to be?"
> "Here, friend Visākha, an untaught ordinary person, who has no regard for noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who has no regard for true men and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. He regards feeling as self, or self as possessed of feeling, or feeling as in self, or self as in feeling. He regards perception as self, or self as possessed of perception, or perception as in self, or self as in perception. He regards formations as self, or self as possessed of formations, or formations as in self, or self as in formations. He regards consciousness as self, or self as possessed of consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That is how identity view comes to be."
> ~ M 44.7 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Although this description is clear, it is a bit terse and may not display its implications immediately. Therefore, in the following passage, the contemporary voice

of Ajahn Chah may help the reader to understand the significance of the grasping at self in its many forms.

> 18.2) The Buddha intended for us to be free of attachment to the five aggregates, to lay them down and give up involvement with them. We cannot give them up, however, because we don't really know them for what they are. We believe happiness to be ourselves; we see ourselves as happy. We believe suffering to be ourselves and see ourselves as unhappy. We can't pull the mind out of this view, which means we are not seeing nature. There isn't any self involved, but we are always thinking in terms of self. Thus it seems that happiness happens to us, suffering happens to us, elation happens to us, depression happens to us. The chain of self is constructed, and with this solid feeling that there is a self, everything seems to be happening to us.
>
> So the Buddha said to destroy this conception, this block called self. When the concept of self is destroyed and finished, we are free of the belief that there is a self in the body, and then the condition of selflessness is naturally revealed. Believing that there is me and mine and living with selfishness, everything is understood as being a self or belonging to a self or somehow relating to a self. When the phenomena of nature are seen thus, there is no real understanding. If nature appears to be good, we laugh and rejoice over it; if phenomena appear to be bad, we cry and lament. Thinking of natural phenomena as constituting ourselves or something we own, we create a great burden of suffering to carry. If we realized the truth of things, we would not have all the drama of excitement, elation, grief, and tears. It is said, "Pacification is true happiness," and this comes when attachment is rooted out through seeing reality.
>
> ~ Ajahn Chah, 'Being Dharma,' pp 166-7

Ajahn Chah's emphasis in teaching about the higher attainments would almost invariably lean toward speaking about that which is relinquished, let go of. This method tended to help his students deal with the obstacle that they were facing, rather than looking to an idealized goal in the future. As the true nature of things is seen clearly and we are able to discard that which fetters or obstructs us, we are more able to be established in a true refuge.

The clear seeing of stream-entry is the force behind the cutting off of this fetter. Identity views take the five khandhas as their focus. When these five khandhas are seen arising and ceasing in the context of causal conditions and dependently arisen, a fixed view of self is cut off and dropped. Particularly the allowing of the khandhas to cease in the awareness of dependent origination in its cessation mode opens the way for the experience of the Deathless; the tendency to view the khandhas as self is then eradicated. The sotāpanna has seen clearly the nature of body and mind. Although experiencing illness would normally create suffering, the mind of a sotāpanna is not overwhelmed. Nakulapitā, the protagonist in this next sutta, was a stream-enterer and was declared by the Buddha foremost among his male lay disciples who were trustworthy.

> 18.3) “And how, householder, is one afflicted in body but not afflicted in mind? Here, householder, the instructed noble disciple, who is a seer of the noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, who is a seer of superior persons and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, does not regard form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form. He does not live obsessed by the notions: ‘I am form, form is mine.’ As he lives unobsessed by these notions, that form of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, there do not arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair.”

And similarly for feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness.

> “It is in such a way, householder, that one is afflicted in body but not afflicted in mind...”
> This is what the Venerable Sāriputta said. Elated, the householder Nakulapitā delighted in the Venerable Sāriputta’s statement.
> ~ S 22.1 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Doubt, the second fetter, is the basis from which we formulate most of our views and opinions of ourselves and the world around us. Perplexity and uncertainty hold beings attached to the world quite firmly. When we see truth only partially, the human tendency is to fill in the blanks and then to cling to what we have constructed. This tendency was especially strong in the Buddha’s time, given

India's rich tradition of exploring religious ideas and practices. But even there, any person who had developed the clear seeing that culminates in entering the stream was able to put aside the whole realm of philosophical speculation and superstitious belief that often dominates the religious landscape. This next sutta is an example of the many types of views, from the Buddha's time, that the sotāpanna would abandon. Although some of the beliefs recounted here might sound quaint to our ears, we in the twenty-first century West have our own array of misguided beliefs which are just as entangling.

> 18.4) At Sāvatthī. "Bhikkhus, when what exists, by clinging to what, by adhering to what, does such a view as this arise: 'The winds do not blow, the rivers do not flow, pregnant women do not give birth, the moon and sun do not rise and set but stand as steady as a pillar'?"
>
> "Venerable sir, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, have the Blessed One as their resort. It would be good if the Blessed One would explain the meaning of these words. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the bhikkhus will remember it."
>
> "When there is form, bhikkhus, by clinging to form, by adhering to form, such a view as this arises: 'The winds do not blow... but stand as steady as a pillar.' When there is feeling... perception... volitional formations... consciousness, by clinging to consciousness, by adhering to consciousness, such a view as this arises: 'The winds do not blow... but stand as steady as a pillar.'
>
> "What do you think, bhikkhus, is form permanent or impermanent?... Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?"
>
> "Impermanent, venerable sir."
>
> "But without clinging to what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, could such a view as that arise?"
>
> "No, venerable sir."
>
> "That which is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, and ranged over by the mind: is that permanent or impermanent?"
>
> "Impermanent, venerable sir."
>
> "Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?"
>
> "Suffering, venerable sir."
>
> "But without clinging to what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, could such a view as that arise?"

> "No, venerable sir."
> "When, bhikkhus, a noble disciple has abandoned perplexity in these six cases, and when, further, he has abandoned perplexity about suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering, he is then called a noble disciple who is a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination."
> ~ S 24.1 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The last fetter – sīlabbataparāmāsa – is translated here as the distorted grasp of rules and vows, the distortion being the underlying belief that there will be purification through keeping particular rules, vows or practices or that by being able to do things the correct way, somehow one will be liberated. Even though precepts and practices form a part of the training, they are a means to the goal of freedom, rather than freedom itself.

> 18.5) Now where do skillful habits cease without trace? Their cessation, too, has been stated: There is the case where a monk is virtuous, but is not defined by his virtue. He discerns, as it actually is, the release of awareness and release of discernment where his skillful habits cease without trace.
> ~ M 78.11 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

The relinquishing of this fetter does not mean that one no longer has to follow precepts. If anything, one would be even more assiduous as cause and effect are clearly seen and the wish to diminish suffering for oneself and others comes to the fore. The keeping of precepts is then seen as a protection and blessing for all.

The insight into the ways that identity view are an obstruction to freedom opens the way for the recognition of the limitations of the next two fetters. When the misperception of identity view is cleared, the heart is free from endless doubts as to what is a suitable refuge. It chooses instead the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha as its refuge.

What follows is probably the most common and consistent description of the stream-enterer in the Canon. The four qualities of faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha and the establishing of a firm foundation in virtue are mentioned again and again as the stream-enterer's hallmark characteristics, but – as we will see – there are other characteristics as well.

18.6) Bhikkhus, although a wheel-turning monarch, having exercised supreme sovereign rulership over the four continents, with the breakup of the body, after death, is reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world, in the company of the devas of the Tāvatiṃsa realm, and there in the Nandana Grove, accompanied by a retinue of celestial nymphs, he enjoys himself supplied and endowed with the five cords of celestial sensual pleasure, still, as he does not possess four things, he is not freed from hell, the animal realm, and the domain of ghosts, not freed from the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world. Although, bhikkhus, a noble disciple maintains himself by lumps of almsfood and wears rag-robes, still, as he possesses four things, he is freed from hell, the animal realm, and the domain of ghosts, freed from the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world.

What are the four? Here, bhikkhus, the noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha thus: "The Blessed One is an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One."

He possesses confirmed confidence in the Dhamma thus: "The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One, directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise."

He possesses confirmed confidence in the Sangha thus: "The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is practising the good way, practising the straight way, practising the true way, practising the proper way; that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals – this Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world."

He possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones – unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, freeing, praised by the wise, ungrasped, leading to concentration.

He possesses these four things. And, bhikkhus, between the obtaining of sovereignty over the four continents and the

> obtaining of the four things, the obtaining of sovereignty over the four continents is not worth a sixteenth part of the obtaining of the four things.
> ~ S 55.1 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 18.7) Bhikkhus, a noble disciple who possesses these four things is a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination.
> ~ S 55.2 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

It cannot be overemphasized that 'confirmed confidence' in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha plays a key role both in the suttas – which use this template over and over again in the reference to entering the stream – and within the mind itself. Throughout this chapter, this factor will keep reappearing in many different ways. The repetition of these qualities is so consistent in the Canon that attention will be drawn to its significance by including several references to it throughout the text.

Internally, such confirmed confidence is not just a new belief or fleeting faith that arises in the heart of the practitioner. It is a radical change, a going-beyond-doubt that the external world and the internal universe are not a suitable refuge for one seeking an end to suffering. The faith in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha is based on a clear understanding of the benefits of relinquishing desire and ignorance and truly relying on awakened knowing, truth and virtue. The full implications of this faith may not be totally understood at this entry point, but the heart has seen and knows that this is the way forward and that the stream of Dhamma being entered is true.

The following sutta gathers in one place some of the different characteristics and qualities of a sotāpanna, that is, the commitment to virtue, faith, and to the wisdom that understands the true nature of things. The mention of observing dependent origination for oneself shows that the sotāpanna relies exclusively on seeing Dhamma rather than on an external method, ritual, ceremony or vows.

This sutta gives us a perspective on what a person who sees Dhamma actually sees, the results and workings of kamma and the mind that convince the person that virtue is an essential element of a life well-lived, that the virtues of the Refuges are incomparable. Thus, the stream-enterer is able to be free of the fetters and is established in the Refuges – not through blind belief, but through the penetration of truth.

18.8) At Sāvatthī. Then the householder Anāthapiṇḍika approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. The Blessed One then said to him:

"Householder, when five fearful animosities have subsided in a noble disciple, and he possesses the four factors of stream-entry, and he has clearly seen and thoroughly penetrated with wisdom the noble method, if he wishes he could by himself declare of himself: 'I am one finished with hell, finished with the animal realm, finished with the domain of ghosts, finished with the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world. I am a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as my destination.'

"What are the five fearful animosities that have subsided? Householder, one who destroys life engenders, on account of such behaviour, fearful animosity pertaining to the present life and fearful animosity pertaining to the future life, and he experiences mental pain and displeasure. Thus for one who abstains from destroying life, this fearful animosity has subsided.

"One who takes what is not given... who engages in sexual misconduct... who speaks falsely... who indulges in wine, liquor, and intoxicants that are a basis for negligence engenders, on account of such behaviour, fearful animosity pertaining to the present life and fearful animosity pertaining to the future life, and he experiences mental pain and displeasure. Thus for one who abstains from wine, liquor, and intoxicants that are a basis for negligence, this fearful animosity has subsided.

"These are the five fearful animosities that have subsided.

"What are the four factors of stream-entry that he possesses? Here, householder, the noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha thus: 'The Blessed One is an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.'

"He possesses confirmed confidence in the Dhamma thus: 'The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One, directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be

personally experienced by the wise.'

"He possesses confirmed confidence in the Sangha thus: 'The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is practising the good way, practising the straight way, practising the true way, practising the proper way; that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals – this Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world.'

"He possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones – unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, freeing, praised by the wise, ungrasped, leading to concentration.

"These are the four factors of stream-entry that he possesses.

"And what is the noble method that he has clearly seen and thoroughly penetrated with wisdom? Here, householder, the noble disciple attends closely and carefully to dependent origination itself thus: 'When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases. That is, with ignorance as condition, volitional formations [come to be]; with volitional formations as condition, consciousness... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of volitional formations, cessation of consciousness... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.'

"This is the noble method that he has clearly seen and thoroughly penetrated with wisdom.

"When, householder, these five fearful animosities have subsided in a noble disciple, and he possesses these four factors of stream-entry, and he has clearly seen and thoroughly penetrated with wisdom this noble method, if he wishes he could by himself declare of himself: 'I am one finished with hell, finished with the animal realm, finished with the domain of ghosts, finished with the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world. I am a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as my destination.'"

~ S 12.41 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Having established oneself in the Noble Eightfold Path as described by Sariputta in §16.8 and entered the stream, the knot of clinging to the fetters unravels. The sotāpanna is steeped in this Path, lives according to it, and is unwavering in commitment to it.

The Path begins with the elements of wisdom – that is, right view and right intention, and here would be a good opportunity to bring forward some examples of this commitment in order to illustrate how the wisdom aspects are a result of entering the stream.

> 18.9) Bhikkhus, suppose there were a seafaring ship bound with rigging that had been worn out in the water for six months. It would be hauled up on dry land during the cold season and its rigging would be further attacked by wind and sun. Inundated by rain from a rain cloud, the rigging would easily collapse and rot away. So too, when a bhikkhu develops and cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path, his fetters easily collapse and rot away.
> And how is this so? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu develops right view... right concentration, which is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. It is in this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu develops and cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path so that his fetters easily collapse and rot away.
> ~ S 45.158 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 18.10) Bhikkhus, suppose there is a guest house. People come from the east, west, north, and south and lodge there; khattiyas, brahmins, vessas, and suddas come and lodge there. So too, when a bhikkhu develops and cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path, he fully understands by direct knowledge those things that are to be fully understood by direct knowledge; he abandons by direct knowledge those things that are to be abandoned by direct knowledge; he realizes by direct knowledge those things that are to be realized by direct knowledge; he develops by direct knowledge those things that are to be developed by direct knowledge.
> And what, bhikkhus, are the things to be fully understood by direct knowledge? It should be said: the five aggregates subject to clinging. What five? The form aggregate subject to clinging... the consciousness aggregate subject to clinging. These are the things to be fully understood by direct knowledge.

> And what, bhikkhus, are the things to be abandoned by direct knowledge? Ignorance and craving for existence. These are the things to be abandoned by direct knowledge.
> And what, bhikkhus, are the things to be realized by direct knowledge? True knowledge and liberation. These are the things to be realized by direct knowledge.
> And what, bhikkhus, are the things to be developed by direct knowledge? Serenity and insight. These are the things to be developed by direct knowledge.
> And how is it, bhikkhus, that when a bhikkhu develops and cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path, he fully understands by direct knowledge those things that are to be fully understood by direct knowledge… he develops by direct knowledge those things that are to be developed by direct knowledge? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu develops right view… right concentration, which is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. It is in this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu develops and cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path so that he fully understands by direct knowledge those things that are to be fully understood by direct knowledge… he develops by direct knowledge those things that are to be developed by direct knowledge.
> ~ S 45.159 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The following sutta is somewhat similar to previous ones. Its primary distinction is its description of the sotāpanna as one who lives with Refuges in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha firmly established – but has generosity as the other defining characteristic intrinsic within the heart.

The sutta starts with the Buddha in conversation with some chamberlains who have proclaimed their devotion to him, as well as their sadness at seeing him leave for a walking tour and their gladness at his return. A discussion of the difficulties of living in the world then ensues:

> 18.11) The chamberlains Isidatta and Purāṇa paid homage to the Blessed One, sat down to one side, and said to him:
> "Venerable sir, when we hear that the Blessed One will set out from Sāvatthī on tour among the Kosalans, on that occasion there arises in us distress and displeasure at the thought: 'The Blessed One will be far away from us.' Then when we hear that the

Blessed One has set out from Sāvatthī on tour among the Kosalans, on that occasion there arises in us distress and displeasure at the thought: 'The Blessed One is far away from us.' ... But, venerable sir, when we hear that the Blessed One will set out from among the Magadhans on tour in the Kāsian country, on that occasion there arises in us elation and joy at the thought: 'The Blessed One will be near to us.'"

"Therefore, chamberlains, the household life is confinement, a path of dust. The going forth is like the open air. It is enough for you, chamberlains, to be diligent."

"Venerable sir, we are subject to another confinement even more confining and considered more confining than the former one."

"But what, chamberlains, is that other confinement to which you are subject, which is even more confining and considered more confining than the former one?"

"Here, venerable sir, when King Pasenadi of Kosala wants to make an excursion to his pleasure garden, after we have prepared his riding elephants we have to place the king's dear and beloved wives on their seats, one in front and one behind. Now, venerable sir, the scent of those ladies is just like that of a perfumed casket briefly opened; so it is with the royal ladies wearing scent. Also, venerable sir, the bodily touch of those ladies is just like that of a tuft of cotton wool or kapok; so it is with the royal ladies so delicately nurtured. Now on that occasion, venerable sir, the elephants must be guarded, and those ladies must be guarded, and we ourselves must be guarded, yet we do not recall giving rise to an evil state of mind in regard to those ladies. This, venerable sir, is that other confinement to which we are subject, which is even more confining and considered more confining than the former one."

"Therefore, chamberlains, the household life is confinement, a path of dust. The going forth is like the open air. It is enough for you, chamberlains, to be diligent. The noble disciple, chamberlains, who possesses four things is a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination.

"What four? Here, chamberlains, a noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha thus: 'The Blessed One is... teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed

> One.' He possesses confirmed confidence in the Dhamma... in the Sangha... He dwells at home with a mind devoid of the stain of stinginess, freely generous, open-handed, delighting in relinquishment, one devoted to charity, delighting in giving and sharing. A noble disciple who possesses these four things is a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination.
> "Chamberlains, you possess confirmed confidence in the Buddha... in the Dhamma... in the Sangha... Moreover, whatever there is in your family that is suitable for giving, all that you share unreservedly among those who are virtuous and of good character. What do you think, carpenters, how many people are there among the Kosalans who are your equals, that is, in regard to giving and sharing?"
> "It is a gain for us, venerable sir, it is well gained by us, venerable sir, that the Blessed One understands us so well."
> ~ S 55.6 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

A discourse given by the Buddha to the quarreling monks of Kosambi, gives a comprehensive description of the results of being established in Dhamma. This is a particularly poignant context for this discussion, as problems of disharmony within the Sangha (or in society in general) would be solved if people took the Buddha's advice and realized stream-entry.

The impact of one's views is not confined to the world of ideas. It has implications in one's actions and interactions with the world. Although stream-enterers are not freed from defilement, they have attenuated enough that they would never get into the kind of quarrels and strife that happened at Kosambi. This discourse gives one of the clearest pictures both of what a person aiming at stream-entry must wrestle with internally, but also of how one who has entered the stream would interact with the world. This is particularly clear in the sārāṇīya-dhammas, or 'memorable qualities,' which will be discussed in more detail shortly.

> 18.12) Of these memorable qualities, the highest, the most comprehensive, the most conclusive is this view that is noble and emancipating, and leads the one who practises in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering. Just as the highest, the most comprehensive, the most conclusive part of a pinnacled building is the pinnacle itself, so too, of these six memorable qualities, the highest... is this view that is noble and emancipating...

And how does this view that is noble and emancipating lead the one who practises in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering?

Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, considers thus: "Is there any obsession unabandoned in myself that might so obsess my mind that I cannot know or see things as they actually are?" If a bhikkhu is obsessed by sensual lust, then his mind is obsessed. If he is obsessed by ill will, then his mind is obsessed. If he is obsessed by sloth and torpor, then his mind is obsessed. If he is obsessed by restlessness and remorse, then his mind is obsessed. If he is obsessed by doubt, then his mind is obsessed. If a bhikkhu is absorbed in speculation about this world, then his mind is obsessed. If a bhikkhu is absorbed in speculation about the other world, then his mind is obsessed. If a bhikkhu takes to quarrelling and brawling and is deep in disputes, stabbing others with verbal daggers, then his mind is obsessed.

He understands thus: "There is no obsession unabandoned in myself that might so obsess my mind that I cannot know and see things as they actually are. My mind is well disposed for awakening to the truths." This is the first knowledge attained by him that is noble, supramundane, not shared by ordinary people.

Again, a noble disciple considers thus: "When I pursue, develop, and cultivate this view, do I obtain internal serenity, do I obtain stillness?"

He understands thus: "When I pursue, develop, and cultivate this view, I obtain internal serenity, I personally obtain stillness." This is the second knowledge attained by him that is noble, supramundane, not shared by ordinary people.

Again, a noble disciple considers thus: "Is there any other recluse or brahmin outside [the Buddha's Dispensation] possessed of a view such as I possess?"

He understands thus: "There is no other recluse or brahmin outside [the Buddha's Dispensation] possessed of a view such as I possess." This is the third knowledge attained by him that is noble, supramundane, not shared by ordinary people.

Again, a noble disciple considers thus: "Do I possess the character of a person who possesses right view?" What is the

character of a person who possesses right view? This is the character of a person who possesses right view: although he may commit some kind of offence for which a means of rehabilitation has been laid down, still he at once confesses, reveals, and discloses it to the Teacher or to wise companions in the holy life, and having done that, he enters upon restraint for the future. Just as a young, tender infant lying prone at once draws back when he puts his hand or his foot on a live coal, so too, that is the character of a person who possesses right view.

He understands thus: "I possess the character of a person who possesses right view." This is the fourth knowledge attained by him that is noble, supramundane, not shared by ordinary people.

Again, a noble disciple considers thus: "Do I possess the character of a person who possesses right view?" What is the character of a person who possesses right view? This is the character of a person who possesses right view: although he may be active in various matters for his companions in the holy life, yet he has a keen regard for training in the higher virtue, training in the higher mind, and training in the higher wisdom. Just as a cow with a new calf, while she grazes watches her calf, so too, that is the character of a person who possesses right view.

He understands thus: "I possess the character of a person who possesses right view." This is the fifth knowledge attained by him that is noble, supramundane, not shared by ordinary people.

Again, a noble disciple considers thus: "Do I possess the strength of a person who possesses right view?" What is the strength of a person who possesses right view? This is the strength of a person who possesses right view: when the Dhamma and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata is being taught, he heeds it, gives it attention, engages it with all his mind, hears the Dhamma as with eager ears.

He understands thus: "I possess the strength of a person who possesses right view." This is the sixth knowledge attained by him that is noble, supramundane, not shared by ordinary people.

Again, a noble disciple considers thus: "Do I possess the strength of a person who possesses right view?" What is the strength of a person who possesses right view? This is the strength of a person who possesses right view: when the Dhamma and Discipline

> proclaimed by the Tathāgata is being taught, he gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma.
> He understands thus: "I possess the strength of a person who possesses right view." This is the seventh knowledge attained by him that is noble, supramundane, not shared by ordinary people.
> When a noble disciple is thus possessed of seven factors, he has well sought the character for realisation of the fruit of stream-entry. When a noble disciple is thus possessed of seven factors, he possesses the fruit of stream-entry.
> ~ M 48.7-15 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

As was mentioned above, right view does not just confine itself to having correct ideas and intentions. Conduct is necessarily affected, and the lives of sotāpannas are exemplary. The sārāṇīya-dhammas are standards of conduct by which sotāpannas would tend to live. The term is variously translated as 'principles of cordiality,' 'states of conciliation,' or 'virtues for fraternal living.' These are considered intrinsic to a sotāpanna as the last quality states that a person endowed with these qualities would "possess the view that is noble and emancipating..."

These memorable qualities, if followed, would allow the Sangha (or any society) to live in concord. In the following passage the Buddha is encouraging the monks to consider the difference between their conduct and that of one who has entered the stream of Dhamma.

> 18.13) There are, O monks, these six principles of cordiality that create love and respect and conduce to helpfulness, to non-dispute, to concord and to unity. What six?
> Here, a monk maintains bodily acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private towards his fellow monks. This is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect...
> Again, a monk maintains verbal acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private towards his fellow monks. This too is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect...
> Again, a monk maintains mental acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private towards his fellow monks. This too is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect...
> Again, a monk uses things in common with his virtuous fellow monks; without making reservations, he shares with them any righteous gain that has been righteously obtained, including even

> the contents of his bowl. This too is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect...
> Again, a monk dwells both in public and in private possessing in common with his fellow monks virtues that are unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, freeing, praised by the wise, unadhered to, leading to concentration. This too is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect...
> Again, a monk dwells both in public and in private possessing in common with his fellow monks the view that is noble and emancipating and that leads one who acts in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering. This too is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect...
> These, monks, are the six principles of cordiality that create love and respect and conduce to helpfulness, to non-dispute, to concord and to unity.
> ~ A 6.12 (Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

This next example expresses the qualities of a sotāpanna in the negative, i.e. what he or she would avoid entirely: wrong views of reality and any misconduct which would bring irreversible results, such as rebirth in the lowest realms stemming from these 'five heinous crimes.' The phrase 'possessing right view' is a synonym for stream-enterer.

> 18.14) "But, venerable sir, in what way can a bhikkhu be called skilled in what is possible and what is impossible?"
> "Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could treat any formation as permanent – there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might treat some formation as permanent – there is such a possibility.' He understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could treat any formation as pleasurable – there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might treat some formation as pleasurable – there is such a possibility.' He understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could treat anything as self – there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might treat something as self – there is such a possibility.'

> "He understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could deprive his mother of life – there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might deprive his mother of life – there is such a possibility.' He understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could deprive his father of life… could deprive an arahant of life – there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might deprive his father of life… might deprive an arahant of life – there is such a possibility.' He understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could, with a mind of hate, shed a Tathāgata's blood – there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might, with a mind of hate, shed a Tathāgata's blood – there is such a possibility.' He understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could cause a schism in the Sangha… could acknowledge another teacher – there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might cause a schism in the Sangha… might acknowledge another teacher – there is such a possibility.'"
> ~ M 115.12-13 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The last section of the Eightfold Path (i.e. right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration) pertains to the practice of meditation. We will now briefly consider one aspect of this part of the training and its relationship to stream-entry.

In this following sutta, the Buddha points out that there is a possibility that sotāpannas might not be diligent or might be lax in their training at times. This is obviously not the standard that the Buddha encouraged, but it is helpful to recognize what the mind still harbouring defilements is capable of, so that it is not a source of discouragement and for the arousing of appropriate antidotes:

> 18.15) On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in Nigrodha's Park. Then Nandiya the Sakyan approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him:
> "Venerable sir, when the four factors of stream-entry are completely and totally nonexistent in a noble disciple, would that noble disciple be one who dwells negligently?"

"Nandiya, I say that one in whom the four factors of stream-entry are completely and totally absent is 'an outsider, one who stands in the faction of worldlings.' But, Nandiya, as to how a noble disciple is one who dwells negligently and one who dwells diligently, listen to that and attend closely, I will speak."

"Yes, venerable sir," Nandiya the Sakyan replied. The Blessed One said this:

"And how, Nandiya, is a noble disciple one who dwells negligently? Here, Nandiya, a noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha thus: 'The Blessed One is... teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.' Content with that confirmed confidence in the Buddha, he does not make further effort for solitude by day nor for seclusion at night. When he thus dwells negligently, there is no gladness. When there is no gladness, there is no rapture. When there is no rapture, there is no tranquillity. When there is no tranquillity, he dwells in suffering. The mind of one who suffers does not become concentrated. When the mind is not concentrated, phenomena do not become manifest. Because phenomena do not become manifest, he is reckoned as 'one who dwells negligently.' [F.L. Woodward translation – "Owing to the teachings being obscure to him, he is reckoned..."]

"Again, Nandiya, a noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Dhamma... in the Sangha... He possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones, unbroken... leading to concentration. Content with those virtues dear to the noble ones, he does not make further effort for solitude by day nor for seclusion at night. When he thus dwells negligently, there is no gladness... Because phenomena do not become manifest, he is reckoned as one who dwells negligently.'

"It is in this way, Nandiya, that a noble disciple is one who dwells negligently.

"And how, Nandiya, is a noble disciple one who dwells diligently? Here, Nandiya, a noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha thus: 'The Blessed One is... teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.' Not content with that confirmed confidence in the Buddha, he makes further effort for solitude by day and for seclusion at night. When he thus dwells diligently, gladness is born. When he is gladdened, rapture is born. When the mind is uplifted by rapture, the body

> becomes tranquil. One tranquil in body experiences happiness. The mind of one who is happy becomes concentrated. When the mind is concentrated, phenomena become manifest. Because phenomena become manifest, he is reckoned as 'one who dwells diligently.'
> "Again, Nandiya, a noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Dhamma... in the Sangha... He possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones, unbroken... leading to concentration. Not content with those virtues dear to the noble ones, he makes further effort for solitude by day and for seclusion at night. When he thus dwells diligently, gladness is born... Because phenomena become manifest, he is reckoned as 'one who dwells diligently.'
> "It is in this way, Nandiya, that a noble disciple is one who dwells diligently."
> ~ S 55.40 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

To complete this section on the relinquishing of the fetters, some leeway will be taken to introduce other aspects of what is let go of, but which do not fall specifically under that category. A passage in the Vinaya states that a sotāpanna relinquishes the four agati – wrong courses of behaviour; or prejudices. These are: 1) chandāgati – prejudice caused by love or desire, partiality; 2) dosāgati – prejudice caused by hatred or enmity; 3) mohāgati – prejudice caused by delusion or stupidity; 4) bhayāgati – prejudice caused by fear.

Bhikkhu Bodhi writes in one of his footnotes to the Majjhima Nikāya that the ancient Majjhima Commentary says that the stream-enterer has abandoned (samucchedapahāna – abandonment by eradication) contempt, a domineering attitude, envy, avarice, deceit and fraud. These are truly important traits of those who have realized Dhamma. The lives of such people are not drawn into the prejudices and biases that would create disharmony and discord in the world and the society in which they live. A world with more sotāpannas would obviously be a different world from the one we live in today.

19

SOTĀPANNA: THE SPIRITUAL TURNING POINT IV

What is reaped

In the last chapter we discussed the qualities that characterize stream-enterers. Now we will focus on the well-being that those qualities provide – both for stream-enterers themselves and for the world around them.

This next illustration makes it extremely clear that a great gain has been realized by one who has entered the stream, here described as 'diṭṭhisampanna' – accomplished in view. Here the Buddha also clearly states that the stream-enterer has a maximum of no more than seven subsequent lives. This sutta is followed by several suttas giving similarly vivid images comparing the sufferings facing the ordinary person with the greatly reduced sufferings facing a sotapannā, e.g: the great earth versus seven little balls of clay; the great ocean versus two or three drops of water; the Himalayas versus seven grains of gravel the size of mustard seeds...

> 19.1) Then the Blessed One took up a little bit of soil in his fingernail and addressed the bhikkhus thus:
> "Bhikkhus, what do you think which is more: the little bit of soil that I have taken up in my fingernail or this great earth?"
> "Venerable sir, the great earth is more. The little bit of soil that the Blessed One has taken up in his fingernail is trifling. Compared to the great earth, that little bit of soil is not calculable, does not bear comparison, does not amount even to a fraction."
> "So too, bhikkhus, for a noble disciple, a person accomplished in view who has made the breakthrough, the suffering that has been destroyed and eliminated is more, while that which remains is trifling. Compared to the former mass of suffering that has been destroyed and eliminated, the latter is not calculable, does

> not bear comparison, does not amount even to a fraction, as there is a maximum of seven more lives. He is one who understands as it really is: 'This is suffering'... 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.'
> "Therefore, bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand: 'This is suffering.'... An exertion should be made to understand: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.'"
> ~ S 56.51 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The sotāpanna and one practising for sotāpatti (stream-entry) are considered great beings, along with people who have attained or are practising for even higher attainments. They are rightly regarded with respect. The daily chants of the Theravāda tradition in the recollection of the Sangha, include reference to the sotāpanna and one practising for sotāpatti (stream-entry) as dakkhiṇeyya-puggala – worthy of gifts, worthy of offerings. Such people are truly a wonderful and marvelous blessing for the world.

> 19.2) Just as the great ocean is the abode of vast creatures; even so is this Dhamma and Discipline the domain of great beings: the stream-enterer and the one practising for the realization of the fruit of stream-entry;... once-returner... non-returner... arahant... This is the eighth wonderful and marvellous quality in this Dhamma and Discipline, which the monks perceive again and again and by reason of which they take delight in it [i.e. Dhamma Vinaya].
> ~ A 8.19 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 19.3) By giving a gift to one who has entered upon the way to the realisation of the fruit of stream-entry, the offering may be expected to repay incalculably, immeasurably. What, then, should be said about giving a gift to a stream-enterer?
> ~ M 142.6 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

In addition to the happiness they provide for others, sotāpannas find an immeasurable source of happiness in their attainment. Whether a sotāpanna is a layperson or a monastic, young or old, male or female, the nature of the liberation is exactly the same. In this next discourse, Mahānāma, who is the ruler of the Sakyans and a cousin to the Buddha, is asking the Buddha how to counsel a wise

lay follower who is ill. His question arose because the Buddha was about to leave on walking tour and would not be in Kapilavatthu for some time:

> 19.4) A wise lay follower, Mahānāma, who is sick, afflicted, and gravely ill should be consoled by another wise lay follower with four consolations: "Let the venerable one be consoled. You have confirmed confidence in the Buddha thus: 'The Blessed One is… teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.' You have confirmed confidence in the Dhamma… in the Sangha… You have the virtues dear to the noble ones, unbroken… leading to concentration."
> After a wise lay follower, who is sick, afflicted, and gravely ill has been consoled by a wise lay follower with these four consolations, he should be asked: "Are you anxious about your mother and father?" If he says: "I am," he should be told: "But, good sir, you are subject to death. Whether you are anxious about your mother and father or not, you will die anyway. So please abandon your anxiety over your mother and father."

And also to abandon anxiety over wife and family. Then withdrawing attention from sensuality, then the different ascending heavenly realms.

> If he says: "My mind has been withdrawn from the brahmā world; I have directed my mind to the cessation of identity," then, Mahānāma, I say there is no difference between a lay follower who is thus liberated in mind and a bhikkhu who has been liberated in mind for a hundred years, that is, between one liberation and the other.
> ~ S 55.54 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

A sotāpanna may feel grief or experience defilement but – with just a bit of admonishment – be able quickly to let go of these mind states and be re-established in the Dhamma. This is illustrated by the following story concerning Visākhā, the great female lay-disciple, who was a stream-enterer:

> 19.5) Thus have I heard. At one time the Lord was staying near Sāvatthī in the Eastern Park at Migāra's mother's mansion. On that occasion the dearly beloved grandchild of Visākhā, Migāra's mother, had died. Then Visākhā, Migāra's mother, with

> wet clothes and hair, [a custom of mourning in India during that time] approached the Lord in the middle of the day. Having prostrated herself, she sat down to one side, and the Lord said to her: "Where have you come from, Visākhā, arriving here in the middle of the day with wet clothes and hair?"
> "Revered sir, my dearly beloved grandchild has died. That is why I have arrived here in the middle of the day with wet clothes and hair."
> "Visākhā, would you like to have as many children and grandchildren as there are people in Sāvatthī?"
> "I would, Lord, like to have as many children and grandchildren as there are people in Sāvatthī."
> "But how many people, Visākhā, die daily in Sāvatthī?"
> "Perhaps ten people, revered sir, die daily in Sāvatthī. Or perhaps nine people die... or eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two people die... or perhaps one person dies daily in Sāvatthī. Revered sir, Sāvatthī is never without people dying."
> "What do you think, Visākhā, would you ever be without wet clothes or wet hair?"
> "No, revered sir. Enough with my having so many children and grandchildren!"
> ~ Ud 8.8 (John D. Ireland trans.)

In the next two short suttas, the Buddha points to the sotāpanna's qualities as a foundation for happiness. In the human realm we always tend to be averse to suffering and to desire happiness. Thus whatever can create a firm foundation for happiness is of great value. It is important to notice that sotāpannas have gained a stable and inexhaustible source of happiness in their personal lives. For one person to have that stability and set it as an example for others would necessarily bring a great deal of well-being to many people.

> 19.6) Monks, there are these four streams of merit, streams of the wholesome, nourishments of happiness, which are heavenly, ripening in happiness, conducive to heaven, and which lead to whatever is wished for, loved and agreeable, to one's welfare and happiness. What four?
> Here, bhikkhus, a noble disciple possesses unwavering confidence in the Buddha thus: 'The Blessed One is an arahant...'

> Again, he possesses unwavering confidence in the Dhamma thus: 'The Dhamma is well expounded...'
> Again, he possesses unwavering confidence in the Sangha thus: 'The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is practising the good way...'
> Again, he possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones...
> These are the four streams of merit, streams of the wholesome, nourishments of happiness, which are heavenly, ripening in happiness, conducive to heaven, and which lead to whatever is wished for, loved and agreeable, to one's welfare and happiness.
> ~ A 4.52 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 19.7) When, bhikkhus, a noble disciple possesses these four streams of merit, streams of the wholesome, it is not easy to take the measure of his merit thus: "Just so much is his stream of merit, stream of the wholesome, nutriment of happiness"; rather, it is reckoned as an incalculable, immeasurable, great mass of merit.
> Bhikkhus, just as it is not easy to take the measure of the water in the great ocean thus: "There are so many gallons of water," or "There are so many hundreds of gallons of water," or "There are so many thousands of gallons of water," or "There are so many hundreds of thousands of gallons of water," but rather it is reckoned as an incalculable, immeasurable, great mass of water; so too, when a noble disciple possesses these four streams of merit... it is reckoned as an incalculable, immeasurable, great mass of merit.
> ~ S 55.41 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Part of this merit – or happiness – is a life with much decreased dukkha and an intrepidity when faced with difficult circumstances, even death.

Anāthapiṇḍika was one of the foremost lay supporters of the Buddha and was able to reap the fruits of his long association with the Buddha and the Sangha. He appears in this next discourse, which highlights the equation of the Noble Eightfold Path with the stream of Dhamma. As well as mentioning the Eightfold Path, it illustrates other characteristics of the sotāpanna and shows how Refuges and virtue are firmly established in the heart of a stream-enterer.

The discourse shows that a sotāpanna such as Anāthapiṇḍika is able to recollect the Refuges and not only be prepared for death but, because of his

delight in Dhamma, his pain and discomfort disappeared completely at that time and he was able to get up and actively serve the Sangha.

> 19.8) At Sāvatthī. Now on that occasion the householder Anāthapiṇḍika was sick, afflicted, gravely ill. Then the householder Anāthapiṇḍika addressed a man thus:
> "Come, good man, approach the Venerable Sāriputta, pay homage to him in my name with your head at his feet, and say: 'Venerable sir, the householder Anāthapiṇḍika is sick, afflicted, gravely ill; he pays homage to the Venerable Sāriputta with his head at his feet.' Then say: 'It would be good, venerable sir, if the Venerable Sāriputta would come to the residence of the householder Anāthapiṇḍika out of compassion.'"
> "Yes, master," that man replied, and he approached the Venerable Sāriputta, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and delivered his message. The Venerable Sāriputta consented by silence.
> Then, in the morning, the Venerable Sāriputta dressed and, taking bowl and robe, went to the residence of the householder Anāthapiṇḍika with the Venerable Ānanda as his companion. He then sat down in the appointed seat and said to the householder Anāthapiṇḍika: "I hope you are bearing up, householder, I hope you are getting better. I hope your painful feelings are subsiding and not increasing, and that their subsiding, not their increase, is to be discerned."
> "I am not bearing up, venerable sir, I am not getting better. Strong painful feelings are increasing in me, not subsiding, and their increase, not their subsiding, is to be discerned."
> "You, householder, do not have that distrust towards the Buddha which the uninstructed worldling possesses because of which the latter, with the breakup of the body, after death, is reborn in the plane of misery, in a bad destination, in the nether world, in hell. And you have confirmed confidence in the Buddha thus: 'The Blessed One is an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.' As you consider within yourself that confirmed confidence in the Buddha, your pains may subside on the spot.

"You, householder, do not have that distrust towards the Dhamma which the uninstructed worldling possesses because of which the latter... is reborn in the plane of misery... in hell. And you have confirmed confidence in the Dhamma thus: 'The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One, directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise.' As you consider within yourself that confirmed confidence in the Dhamma, your pains may subside on the spot.

"You, householder, do not have that distrust towards the Sangha which the uninstructed worldling possesses because of which the latter... is reborn in the plane of misery... in hell. And you have confirmed confidence in the Sangha thus: 'The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is practising the good way, practising the straight way, practising the true way, practising the proper way; that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals – this Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world.' As you consider within yourself that confirmed confidence in the Sangha, your pains may subside on the spot.

"You, householder, do not have that immorality which the uninstructed worldling possesses because of which the latter... is reborn in the plane of misery... in hell. And you have those virtues dear to the noble ones, unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, freeing, praised by the wise, ungrasped, leading to concentration. As you consider within yourself those virtues dear to the noble ones, your pains may subside on the spot.

"You, householder, do not have that wrong view which the uninstructed worldling possesses because of which the latter... is reborn in the plane of misery... in hell. And you have right view. As you consider within yourself that right view, your pains may subside on the spot.

"You, householder, do not have that wrong intention... wrong speech... wrong action... wrong livelihood... wrong effort... wrong mindfulness... wrong concentration... wrong knowledge... wrong liberation which the uninstructed worldling possesses because of which the latter... is reborn in the plane of misery... in hell. And you have right intention... right speech... right action...

right livelihood… right effort… right mindfulness… right concentration… right knowledge… right liberation. As you consider within yourself that right liberation, your pains may subside on the spot.”

Then the pains of the householder Anāthapiṇḍika subsided on the spot.

Then the householder Anāthapiṇḍika served the Venerable Sāriputta and the Venerable Ānanda from his own dish. When the Venerable Sāriputta had finished his meal and had put away his bowl, the householder Anāthapiṇḍika took a low seat and sat down to one side, and the Venerable Sāriputta thanked him with these verses:

“When one has faith in the Tathāgata,
Unshakeable and well established,
And good conduct built on virtue,
Dear to the noble ones and praised;

“When one has confidence in the Sangha
And view that has been rectified,
They say that one is not poor,
That one’s life is not vain.

“Therefore the person of intelligence,
Remembering the Buddha’s Teaching,
Should be devoted to faith and virtue,
To confidence and vision of the Dhamma.”

Then the Venerable Sāriputta, having thanked the householder Anāthapiṇḍika with these verses, rose from his seat and departed.

Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. The Blessed One then said to him: “Now, Ānanda, where are you coming from in the middle of the day?”

“The householder Anāthapiṇḍika, venerable sir, has been exhorted by the Venerable Sāriputta with such and such an exhortation.”

> "Sāriputta is wise, Ānanda, Sāriputta has great wisdom, in so far as he can analyse the four factors of stream-entry in ten modes."
> ~ S 55.26 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

This next sutta is a striking case of the extraordinary gain that comes through relinquishing doubt as to what is a true refuge. People who only knew Sarakāni socially thought he was a wastrel and a drunkard, but through the criterion of faith or conviction, and being established in the inclination to right view, he is saved from the fate normally assumed for such a person. Even if it is right at the end, as in this case – he accomplished it at the moment of death – this change of heart is a tremendous gain because it protects one from descending into the lower realms.

This passage also underlines the importance of the death moment and the potency of seizing the opportunity it still offers for establishing oneself in Dhamma rather than being distracted by the defilements of grief, worry, or fear. There is also a very human element in this sutta, in that the various Sakyans are dubious about the Buddha's statement and are willing to criticize him. This discourse also shows us that the faculties for realizing sotāpanna are not so unattainable that they exclude all but those who are exceptionally wise.

> 19.9) At Kapilavatthu. Now on that occasion Sarakāni the Sakyan had died, and the Blessed One had declared him to be a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination. Thereupon a number of Sakyans, having met and assembled, deplored this, grumbled, and complained about it, saying: "It is wonderful indeed, sir! It is amazing indeed, sir! Now who here won't be a stream-enterer when the Blessed One has declared Sarakāni the Sakyan after he died to be a stream-enterer... with enlightenment as his destination? Sarakāni the Sakyan was too weak for the training; he drank intoxicating drink!"
>
> Then Mahānāma the Sakyan approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and reported this matter to him. [The Blessed One said:]
>
> "Mahānāma, when a lay follower has gone for refuge over a long time to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, how could he go to the nether world? For if one speaking rightly were to say of anyone: 'He was a lay follower who had gone for refuge over a long time to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha,' it is of Sarakāni the Sakyan that one could rightly say this. Mahānāma,

Sarakāni the Sakyan had gone for refuge over a long time to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, so how could he go to the nether world?

"Here, Mahānāma, some person possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha thus: 'The Blessed One is... teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.' And so in the Dhamma and the Sangha. He is one of joyous wisdom, of swift wisdom, and he has attained liberation. By the destruction of the taints, in this very life he enters and dwells in the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, realizing it for himself with direct knowledge. This person, Mahānāma, is freed from hell, the animal realm, and the domain of ghosts, freed from the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world.

"Here, Mahānāma, some person possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. He is one of joyous wisdom, of swift wisdom, yet he has not attained liberation. With the utter destruction of the five lower fetters he has become one of spontaneous birth, due to attain Nibbāna there without returning from that world. This person too, Mahānāma, is freed from hell, the animal realm, and the domain of ghosts, freed from the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world.

"Here, Mahānāma, some person possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. He is not one of joyous wisdom, nor of swift wisdom, and he has not attained liberation. With the utter destruction of three fetters and with the diminishing of greed, hatred, and delusion, he is a once-returner who, after coming back to this world only one more time, will make an end to suffering. This person too, Mahānāma, is freed from hell, the animal realm, and the domain of ghosts, freed from the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world.

"Here, Mahānāma, some person possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. He is not one of joyous wisdom, nor of swift wisdom, and he has not attained liberation. With the utter destruction of three fetters he is a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination. This person too, Mahānāma, is freed from hell, the animal realm, and the domain of ghosts, freed from the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world.

"Here, Mahānāma, some person does not possess confirmed

> confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. He is not one of joyous wisdom, nor of swift wisdom, and he has not attained liberation. However, he has these five things: the faculty of faith, the faculty of energy, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, the faculty of wisdom. And the teachings proclaimed by the Tathāgata are accepted by him after being pondered to a sufficient degree with wisdom. This person too, Mahānāma, is one who does not go to hell, the animal realm, or the domain of ghosts, to the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world.
>
> "Here, Mahānāma, some person does not possess confirmed confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. He is not one of joyous wisdom, nor of swift wisdom, and he has not attained liberation. However, he has these five things: the faculty of faith... the faculty of wisdom. And he has sufficient faith in the Tathāgata, sufficient devotion to him. This person too, Mahānāma, is one who does not go to hell, the animal realm, or the domain of ghosts, to the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world.
>
> "Even if these great sal trees, Mahānāma, could understand what is well spoken and what is badly spoken, then I would declare these great sal trees to be stream-enterers, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as their destination. How much more, then, Sarakāni the Sakyan? Mahānāma, Sarakāni the Sakyan fulfilled the training at the time of his death."
>
> ~ S 55.24 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Even when passing away, a sotāpanna brings blessings. Such people are assured of a pleasant rebirth and would be praised by those devas who were of similar faith and virtue:

> 19.10) Bhikkhus, when a noble disciple possesses four things, the devas are elated and speak of his similarity [to themselves]. What four?
>
> Here, bhikkhus, a noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha thus: "The Blessed One is... teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One." To those devatās who passed away here [in the human world] and were

> reborn there [in a heavenly world] possessing confirmed confidence in the Buddha, the thought occurs: "As the noble disciple possesses the same confirmed confidence in the Buddha that we possessed when we passed away there and were reborn here, he will come into the presence of the devas."
> Again, bhikkhus, a noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Dhamma... in the Sangha... He possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones, unbroken... conducive to concentration. To those devatās who passed away here [in the human world] and were reborn there [in a heavenly world] possessing the virtues dear to the noble ones, the thought occurs: "As the noble disciple possesses the same kind of virtues dear to the noble ones that we possessed when we passed away there and were reborn here, he will come into the presence of the devas."
> When, bhikkhus, a noble disciple possesses these four things, the devas are elated and speak of his similarity [to themselves].
> ~ S 55.36 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The fruits arising from stream-entry apply both to this lifetime and to the life to come, benefiting oneself and others.

In this next short sutta, the Buddha points to six blessings of the sotāpanna. What he says is terse, but has a wide-ranging meaning or implication. As Bhikkhu Bodhi states in his footnote to this passage: "unable to fall back" – that is, one will not fall into the lower realms; "has a set limit to suffering" – the number of future existences is a maximum of seven; "uncommon knowledge" – is the supramundane knowledge of Nibbāna, which is not shared by the common worldling. The understanding of causes, and of things arisen by causes, are reckoned as two distinct blessings.

> 19.11) There are, O monks, these six blessings in realizing the fruit of stream-entry: One is firm in the good Dhamma. One is unable to fall back. One has set a limit to suffering. One is endowed with uncommon knowledge. One has clearly understood causes and the phenomena arisen by causes.
> ~ A 6.97 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 19.12) At Sāvatthī. "Bhikkhus, suppose that the Himalayas, the king of mountains, would be destroyed and eliminated except for seven grains of gravel the size of mustard seeds. What do you

> think, bhikkhus, which is more: the portion of the Himalayas, the king of mountains, that has been destroyed and eliminated or the seven grains of gravel the size of mustard seeds that remain?"
> "Venerable sir, the portion of the Himalayas, the king of mountains, that has been destroyed and eliminated is more. The seven grains of gravel the size of mustard seeds that remain are trifling. They do not amount to a hundredth part, or a thousandth part, or a hundred thousandth part of the portion of the Himalayas, the king of mountains, that has been destroyed and eliminated."
> "So too, bhikkhus, for a noble disciple, a person accomplished in view who has made the breakthrough, the suffering that has been destroyed and eliminated is more, while that which remains is trifling. The latter does not amount to a hundredth part, or a thousandth part, or a hundred thousandth part of the former mass of suffering that has been destroyed and eliminated, as there is a maximum of seven more lives. Of such great benefit, bhikkhus, is the breakthrough to the Dhamma, of such great benefit is it to obtain the vision of the Dhamma."
> ~ S 13.10 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

> 19.13) Bhikkhus, those for whom you have compassion and who think you should be heeded – whether friends or colleagues, relatives or kinsmen – these you should exhort, settle, and establish in the four factors of stream-entry.
> ~ S 55.17 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Beyond the happiness that stream-entry brings in this life and, through death, on into the next, is the happiness in knowing that one's ultimate total liberation is assured.

> 19.14) Bhikkhus, just as, when rain pours down in thick droplets on a mountain top, the water flows down along the slope and fills the clefts, gullies, and creeks; these being filled fill up the pools; these being filled fill up the lakes; these being filled fill up the streams; these being filled fill up the rivers; and these being filled fill up the great ocean; so too, for a noble disciple, these things – confirmed confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and

> the Sangha, and the virtues dear to the noble ones – flow onwards and, having gone beyond, they lead to the destruction of the taints.
> ~ S 55.38 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

A sotāpanna gets safely to the 'other shore' – an image the Buddha frequently used to refer to Nibbāna. In the following sutta the Buddha compares himself and his teaching to a skillful cowherd who is able to take his herd of cows across the Ganges in flood. The bulls, the strong cows, the heifers and the young oxen are compared to arahants, non-returners, and once-returners respectively; they are able to get across safely. Although the sotāpannas may not be as strong as the others, they too are able to reach the safety of the further shore.

> 19.15) "Just as the calves and the feeble cattle breasted the stream of the Ganges and got safely across to the further shore, so too, those bhikkhus who, with the destruction of three fetters, are stream-enterers, no longer subject to perdition, bound [for deliverance], headed for enlightenment – by breasting Māra's stream they too will get safely across to the further shore.
> "Just as that tender calf just born, being urged on by its mother's lowing, also breasted the stream of the Ganges and got safely across to the further shore, so too, those bhikkhus who are Dhamma-followers and faith-followers – by breasting Māra's stream they too will get safely across to the further shore.
> "Bhikkhus, I am skilled in this world and in the other world, skilled in Māra's realm and in what is outside Māra's realm, skilled in the realm of Death and in what is outside the realm of Death. It will lead to the welfare and happiness for a long time of those who think they should listen to me and place faith in me."
> That is what the Blessed One said. When the Sublime One had said that, the Teacher said further:
>
> "Both this world and the world beyond
> Are well described by the one who knows,
> And what is still in Māra's reach
> And what is out of reach of Death.
> Knowing directly all the world,
> The Enlightened One who understands

> Opened the door to the deathless state
> By which Nibbāna may be safely reached;
> For Māra's stream is breasted now,
> Its current blocked, its reeds removed;
> Rejoice then, bhikkhus, mightily
> And set your hearts where safety lies."
> ~ M 34.9-12 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The last example here is the Buddha giving his reasons why it is beneficial to let others know that there are monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen who have realized the fruits of practice.

> 19.16) "What do you think, Anuruddha? What purpose does the Tathāgata see that when a disciple has died, he declares his reappearance thus: 'So-and-so has reappeared in such-and-such a place; so-and-so has reappeared in such-and-such a place'?"
> "Venerable sir, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, have the Blessed One as their resort. It would be good if the Blessed One would explain the meaning of these words. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the bhikkhus will remember it."
> "Anuruddha, it is not for the purpose of scheming to deceive people or for the purpose of flattering people or for the purpose of gain, honour, or renown, or with the thought, 'Let people know me to be thus,' that when a disciple has died, the Tathāgata declares his reappearance thus: 'So-and-so has reappeared in such-and-such a place; so-and-so has reappeared in such-and-such a place.' Rather, it is because there are faithful clansmen inspired and gladdened by what is lofty, who when they hear that, direct their minds to such a state, and that leads to their welfare and happiness for a long time."

The Buddha then refers to bhikkhus who were arahants, anāgāmis, sakadāgāmis, then:

> "Here a bhikkhu hears thus: 'The bhikkhu named so-and-so has died; the Blessed One has declared of him: "With the destruction of three fetters he has become a stream-enterer, no longer subject

> to perdition, bound [for deliverance], headed for enlightenment."' And he has either seen that venerable one for himself or heard it said of him: 'That venerable one's virtue was thus, his state [of concentration] was thus, his wisdom was thus, his abiding [in attainments] was thus, his deliverance was thus.' Recollecting his faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom, he directs his mind to such a state. In this way too a bhikkhu has a comfortable abiding."

The Buddha then refers to bhikkhunīs, laymen, and laywomen in a similar manner:

> "So Anuruddha, it is not for the purpose of scheming to deceive people or for the purpose of flattering people or for the purpose of gain, honour, or renown, or with the thought, 'Let people know me to be thus,' that when a disciple has died, the Tathāgata declares his reappearance thus: 'So-and-so has reappeared in such-and-such a place; so-and-so has reappeared in such-and-such a place.' Rather, it is because there are faithful clansmen inspired and gladdened by what is lofty, who when they hear that, direct their minds to such a state, and that leads to their welfare and happiness for a long time."
> ~ M 68.8-24 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

All these different aspects of the sotāpanna are worthy of much reflection. As human beings we have the opportunity to experience a breakthrough from the stream of the world to the stream of Truth. The discussion of this possibility is not just an idle philosophical pastime, but a practical guide as to how the heart can be set free.

By being attentive to this initial stage of Awakening, we can recognize more clearly what needs to be relinquished and what needs to be cultivated in the immediate present so that we can taste this freedom ourselves. Most significantly, all these teachings show us that, by entering the noble path and embodying the various qualities of the stream-enterer, we could attain 'welfare and happiness for a long time' – both for ourselves and for those around us.

20

"AH, WHAT BLISS!" – THE BLESSINGS OF NIBBĀNA

> 20.1) MONKS, IN ONE OF RIGHT VIEW all deeds whatsoever of body done acccording to that view, all deeds whatsoever of speech… thought… all intentions, aspirations and resolves, all activities whatsoever, all such things conduce to the pleasant, the dear and delightful, the profitable, in short, to happiness. What is the cause of that? Monks, it is because of their fortunate view. Suppose, monks, a seed of sugarcane or paddy or grape be planted in moist soil. Whatsoever essence it derives from earth or water, all that conduces to its sweetness, pleasantness and delicious flavour. What is the cause of that? The fortunate nature of the seed. Just so, monks, in one of right view all deeds whatsoever… conduce to happiness. What is the cause of that? It is because of their fortunate view.
> ~ A 1.17.10

As we reach this last chapter it may be noted that the overall structure of this book has been arranged according to seed, terrain and fruition. The seed refers to basic definitions of Nibbāna. The terrain is pointing to its description and characteristics. The last section on cultivation and fruition takes up the theme of the practice and its results.

Just as in nature a seed that has been planted in the ground and nourished properly will grow, flourish and come to its fruition, in the same way we can plant the fortunate seeds of true knowledge and understanding in the ground of correct practice and living. The results of fruition are then reaped as liberation and freedom of the heart, the most noble goal for human beings to set for themselves.

When a plant brings forth good and sweet fruit, it can bring satisfaction and sustenance for us and for others as well. Similarly, Nibbāna is the sweetest

and most nourishing of spiritual fruits: something that brings true happiness to the person who realizes it – as well as to the world.

Although, on a certain level, Nibbāna is beyond all categorization, either positive or negative, the mind still needs something positive to inspire or motivate it. The Buddha recognized this in his teachings on the four iddhipāda – the four paths to accomplishment (sometimes translated as 'the four bases for success'). This is one of the groups of dhammas in the thirty-seven Bodhipakkhiyadhammas, the qualities conducive to enlightenment.

The first factor is chanda, which is aspiration, desire, or motivation. Nibbāna is as it is and the practitioner's task is to arouse the motivation to make the effort to realize Nibbāna for him- or herself. In this last short chapter, we will consider some of the 'positive' aspects of Nibbāna that can inspire faith as a condition for motivation and effort, thus laying the basis for realizing Nibbāna and bringing blessings into the world.

Having faith and confidence in something naturally draws us toward it; when we have no faith or confidence, there is little or no sense of attraction. Sometimes, people shrink back from Nibbāna, viewing it as a source of loss or a blankness, and so feel little faith or confidence in it. This point is mentioned in the biography of Ajahn Mun:

> 20.2) The trouble is, most people react to talk about Nibbāna by feeling oddly dejected and dismayed. It doesn't put them in a good mood as does talk about worldly matters. Having no personal experience of Nibbāna, they probably think that it's not as enjoyable as the humdrum things they are accustomed to. Not only has the present generation lost interest in Nibbāna – even our parents and grandparents were not much interested, nor did they encourage others to take an interest. At most, they may have encouraged their family... to do meditation practice to calm them down a bit and keep their behaviour within acceptable limits. Of course, one way or another they did manage to advise their family and friends to do just about everything else, until fed up with hearing their advice, most people no longer bothered to take it.
>
> Undoubtedly, most people have already decided that Nibbāna must be a very silent place, there being no music or entertainment and no one to indulge them in their favorite pastimes. They probably see it as a place devoid of anything stimulating or exciting, and therefore, they don't want to go there. They fear dropping into a still, silent hell

> without a soul in sight: There would be no family, no friends and no sounds, ever, of birds and cars, or laughter and crying. It appears to be a rather bleak, undesirable place in every way.
> ~ ‘Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhuridatta Thera: A Spiritual Biography,’ by Ācariya Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno, p 276

Similar attitudes toward Nibbāna were present in the Buddha’s time:

> 20.3) He thinks thus: “So I shall be annihilated! So I shall perish! So I shall be no more!” Then he sorrows, grieves, and laments, he weeps beating his breast and becomes distraught.
> ~ M 22.20 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The Buddha points out that progress on the path is blocked if one cannot see the positive aspects of one’s goal:

> 20.4) Truly, O monks, that a monk who considers Nibbāna... as suffering, can have a conviction that conforms with the Dhamma, that cannot be; and that one who... has not entered into the certainty of rightness should realize the fruits of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning or arahantship, that too cannot be.
> ~ A 6.101 (Nyanaponika Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

To recognize and reflect on the blessings that accrue to those who have contact with one who has realized Nibbāna is one way to highlight the positive element of Nibbāna. The experience of Nibbāna is not something that leaves beings diminished; instead, it leaves them enriched and brings blessings to others.

In this next example, the Buddha points out that for those people who make offerings to the wanderer Saccaka, there would be a difference in the merits and blessings arising from their gifts, as opposed to offering to the Buddha, who was a purified being. The blessings that arise from offerings differ according to the recipients’ degree of virtuous development and freedom from defilement. On this occasion, Saccaka had invited his followers to help in preparing and offering the meal to the Buddha along with the Sangha at his abode.

> 20.5) Then, it being morning, the Blessed One dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, he went with the Sangha of bhikkhus to the park of Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha’s son and sat down on the seat made ready. Then, with his own hands, Saccaka the

> Nigaṇṭha's son served and satisfied the Sangha of bhikkhus headed by the Buddha with the various kinds of good food. When the Blessed One had eaten and had withdrawn his hand from the bowl, Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha's son took a low seat, sat down at one side, and said to the Blessed One: "Master Gotama, may the merit and the great meritorious fruits of this act of giving be for the happiness of the givers."
> "Aggivessana, whatever comes about from giving to a recipient such as yourself – one who is not free from lust, not free from hate, not free from delusion – that will be for the givers. And whatever comes about from giving to a recipient such as myself – one who is free from lust, free from hate, free from delusion – that will be for you."
> ~ M 35.30 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

The Buddha was very aware of the effect of generosity and of the merit generated for the donors when the recipients of their gifts are a well-practised Sangha. Hence, in the following sutta, the Buddha encourages the monks to practise diligently in order to attain Nibbāna so as to increase the blessings that accrue to people who give gifts of the requisites. Thus we can see that the motivation encouraged for following the path to arahantship is unselfish and compassionate. This tends to increase the blessings that arise for everyone's benefit.

> 20.6) "Recluses, recluses," bhikkhus, that is how people perceive you. And when you are asked, "What are you?" you claim that you are recluses. Since that is what you are designated and what you claim to be, you should train thus: "We will undertake and practise those things that make one a recluse, that make one a brahmin, so that our designations may be true and our claims genuine, and so that the services of those whose robes, almsfood, resting place, and medicinal requisites we use shall bring them great fruit and benefit, and so that our going forth shall not be in vain but fruitful and fertile."
> ~ M 39.2 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Another aspect of the blessings generated for others is the delight beings find when coming into contact with one who has realized Nibbāna. Whether the

contact is direct or indirect, whether those who make that contact are in the human realm or a celestial realm, the effect of one who has completely liberated the heart is tangible.

> 20.7) After they had accompanied the Blessed One a little way and turned back again, the venerable Nandiya and the venerable Kimbila asked the venerable Anuruddha: “Have we ever reported to the venerable Anuruddha that we have obtained those abidings and attainments that the venerable Anuruddha, in the Blessed One’s presence, ascribed to us up to the destruction of the taints?”
>
> “The venerable ones have never reported to me that they have obtained those abidings and attainments. Yet by encompassing the venerable ones’ minds with my own mind, I know that they have obtained those abidings and attainments. And deities have also reported to me: ‘These venerable ones have obtained those abidings and attainments.’ Then I declared it when directly questioned by the Blessed One.”
>
> Then the spirit Dīgha Parajana went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to the Blessed One, he stood at one side and said: “It is a gain for the Vajjians, venerable sir, a great gain for the Vajjian people that the Tathāgata, accomplished and fully enlightened, dwells among them and these three clansmen, the venerable Anuruddha, the venerable Nandiya, and the venerable Kimbila!” On hearing the exclamation of the spirit Dīgha Parajana, the earth gods exclaimed: “It is a gain for the Vajjians, a great gain for the Vajjian people that the Tathāgata, accomplished and fully enlightened, dwells among them and these three clansmen, the venerable Anuruddha, the venerable Nandiya, and the venerable Kimbila!” On hearing the exclamation of the earth gods, the gods of the heaven of the Four Great Kings… the gods of the heaven of the Thirty-three… the Yāma gods… the gods of the Tusita heaven… the gods who delight in creating… the gods who wield power over others’ creations… the gods of Brahmā’s retinue exclaimed: “It is a gain for the Vajjians, a great gain for the Vajjian people that the Tathāgata, accomplished and fully enlightened, dwells among them and these three clansmen, the venerable Anuruddha, the venerable Nandiya, and the venerable

> Kimbila!" Thus at that instant, at that moment, those venerable ones were known as far as the Brahma-world.
> ~ M 31.20-21 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Almost all beings are struck with fear and consternation at the prospect of facing death. Having the Buddha pointing out the possibility of Nibbāna – the overcoming of distress and complication – is a source of great faith and confidence, along with well-being and ease of heart.

> 20.8) "So too, bhikkhus, as to those recluses and brahmins who are skilled in this world and the other world, skilled in Māra's realm and what is outside Māra's realm, skilled in the realm of Death and what is outside the realm of Death – it will lead to the welfare and happiness for a long time of those who think they should listen to them and place faith in them...
> "Bhikkhus, I am skilled in this world and in the other world, skilled in Māra's realm and in what is outside Māra's realm, skilled in the realm of Death and in what is outside the realm of Death. It will lead to the welfare and happiness for a long time of those who think they should listen to me and place faith in me."
> That is what the Blessed One said. When the Sublime One had said that, the Teacher said further:
>
> "Both this world and the world beyond
> Are well described by the one who knows,
> And what is still in Māra's reach
> And what is out of reach of Death.
>
> "Knowing directly all the world,
> The Enlightened One who understands
> Opened the door to the deathless state
> By which Nibbāna may be safely reached;
>
> "For Māra's stream is breasted now
> Its current blocked, its reeds removed;
> Rejoice then, bhikkhus, mightily
> And set your hearts where safety lies."
> ~ M 34.5 & .11-12 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

It is useful to continue to consider what kind of happiness is meant by the happiness of the Noble Ones; to try to feel what it would be like to be without any obstructions and hindrances within the heart. As Venerable Mahā-kaccāna explains:

> 20.9) Through the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishment of desire, lust, delight, craving, engagement and clinging, mental standpoints, adherences, and underlying tendencies towards the form element, the mind is said to be well liberated.

And also for the feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness elements.

> Thus, householder, when it was said by the Blessed One in 'The Questions of Sakka': "Those ascetics and brahmins who are liberated in the extinction of craving are those who have reached the ultimate end, the ultimate security from bondage, the ultimate holy life, the ultimate goal, and are best among devas and humans," it is in such a way that the meaning of this, stated in brief by the Blessed One, should be understood in detail.
> S 22.4 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

In the Dhammapada the following verses clearly equate the realization of Nibbāna with happiness:

> 20.10) There is no fire like lust, no evil like hatred.
> There are no disasters equal to the Khandhas.
> There is no happiness greater than the peace of Nibbāna.
>
> Hunger is the most severe bodily disease.
> Conditioned things are the worst calamity.
> When we see this clearly,
> we achieve Nibbāna, the ultimate bliss.
>
> Health is the highest prize.
> Contentment is the greatest wealth.
> A loyal friend is the best relative.
> Nibbāna is the supreme bliss.
> Dhp 202-4 (Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya trans.)

When the Buddha speaks of supreme bliss, it is hard for ordinary human beings to understand the meaning. We tend to draw conclusions based on our worldly experience. So when we contemplate the goal of the teachings we need to be careful that we are considering things from a proper perspective. The Buddha certainly does speak of the happiness of attainment, but what exactly does he mean? Is it anything that we are familiar with? In this next quote, Ajahn Chah points to this – along with another commonly misconceived principle in Buddhist practice:

> 20.11) When we realize things as this one Dhamma, all being of the same nature, we relax our grip, we put things down. We see they are empty, and we don't have love and hate for them; we have peace. It is said, "Nibbāna is the supreme happiness; Nibbāna is the supreme emptiness."
> Please listen to this carefully. Happiness in the world is not supreme, ultimate happiness. What we conceive of as emptiness is not supreme emptiness. If it is supreme emptiness, there is an end of grasping and attachment. If it is supreme happiness, there is peace. But the peace we know is still not supreme. The happiness we know is not supreme. If we reach Nibbāna, then emptiness is supreme. Happiness is supreme. There is a transformation. The character of happiness is transformed into peace. There is happiness, but we don't give it any special meaning. There is suffering also. When these occur, we see them as equal. Their value is the same.
> ~ Ajahn Chah, 'Everything Arises, Everything Falls Away,' p 20, (Paul Breiter trans.)

Therefore the happiness synonymous with liberation is not tied to the world and not tainted by sensuality. And we can see that after the Buddha's enlightenment, the happiness of the untainted mind was accessible to him:

> 20.12) "But, friends, I can abide without moving my body or uttering a word, experiencing the peak of pleasure for one day and night.... for two, three, four, five, and six days and nights... for seven days and nights. What do you think, friends? That being so, who dwells in greater pleasure, King Seniya Bimbisāra of Magadha or I?"

> “That being so, the venerable Gotama abides in greater pleasure than King Seniya Bimbisāra of Magadha.”
> ~ M 14.22 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

In addition to this type of pleasure – accessible to those who have realized Nibbāna – there are more refined aspects which can be realized. In this next quotation, the Buddha details all the different attainments of absorption and refinement of mind, ending with nirodha-samāpatti, ‘the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling.’ In each case he refers to a more sublime happiness.

At first glance, the cessation of perception and feeling would not appear to be happiness at all. But the Buddha is pointing out that wherever and whenever we are able to be free from suffering that is an aspect of well-being. The absence of any obstruction and stain is also what the Buddha perceives as happiness. Contemplating this passage allows us to stretch our notion of what the highest pleasure or happiness might be.

> 20.13) Though some may say, “This is the supreme pleasure and joy that beings experience,” I would not concede this to them. Why is that? Because there is another kind of happiness more excellent and sublime than that happiness. And what is that other kind of happiness? Here, Ānanda, by completely transcending the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling. This is that other kind of happiness more excellent and sublime than the previous kind of happiness.
> Now it is possible, Ānanda, that wanderers of other sects might speak thus: “The ascetic Gotama speaks of the cessation of perception and feeling, and he maintains that it is included in happiness. What is that? How is that?” When wanderers of other sects speak thus, Ānanda, they should be told: “The Blessed One, friends, does not describe a state as included in happiness only with reference to pleasant feeling. But rather, friends, wherever happiness is found and in whatever way, the Tathāgata describes that as included in happiness.”
> ~ S 36.19 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

Because the happiness of Nibbāna is so far out of the range of our ordinary perceptions and assumptions, there is an inherent difficulty in discerning

what it could possibly be. Our tendency is to rely on familiarity with gratification or stimulation, but even in normal circumstances it is easy to see that when desirable things have impinged on consciousness for too long, they become tedious or irritating. In this next sutta, Sāriputta equates happiness with relief from a less exalted sensation or stimulus so that there ceases to be an 'affliction.'

> 20.14) I have heard that on one occasion Ven. Sāriputta was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Feeding Sanctuary. There he said to the monks, "This Nibbāna is pleasant, friends. This Nibbāna is pleasant."
>
> When this was said, Ven. Udāyin said to Ven. Sāriputta, "But what is the pleasure here, my friend, where there is nothing felt?"
>
> "Just that is the pleasure here, my friend: where there is nothing felt. There are these five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye – agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing; sounds cognizable via the ear... smells cognizable via the nose... tastes cognizable via the tongue... tactile sensations cognizable via the body – agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. Whatever pleasure or joy arises in dependence on these five strings of sensuality, that is sensual pleasure.
>
> "Now there is the case where a monk – quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful qualities – enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with sensuality, that is an affliction for him. Just as pain arises as an affliction in a healthy person for his affliction, even so the attention to perceptions dealing with sensuality that beset the monk is an affliction for him. Now, the Blessed One has said that whatever is an affliction is stress. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how Nibbāna is pleasant.
>
> "Then there is the case where a monk, with the stilling of directed thought & evaluation, enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation – internal assurance. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with directed thought, that is an affliction for him...

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the fading of rapture, remains in equanimity, mindful & alert, is physically sensitive to pleasure, and enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasurable abiding.' If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with rapture, that is an affliction for him...

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the abandoning of pleasure & stress – as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress – enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with equanimity, that is an affliction for him...

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of perceptions of [physical] form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, thinking, 'Infinite space,' enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with form, that is an affliction for him...

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, thinking, 'Infinite consciousness,' enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with the dimension of the infinitude of space, that is an affliction for him...

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, thinking, 'There is nothing,' enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, that is an affliction for him...

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with the dimension of nothingness, that is an affliction for him. Now, the Blessed One has said that whatever is an affliction is stress.

> So by this line of reasoning it may be known how pleasant Nibbāna is.
> "Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And, having seen [that] with discernment, his mental fermentations are completely ended. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how Nibbāna is pleasant."
> ~ A 9.34 (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)

The Buddha phrases this principle in a slightly different way or more directly where he says:

> 20.15) And what, bhikkhus, is happiness more spiritual than the spiritual? When a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed reviews his mind liberated from lust, liberated from hatred, liberated from delusion, there arises happiness. This is called happiness more spiritual than the spiritual.
> ~ S 36.31 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

In other words, there is definitely a happiness experienced with the destruction of all defilements and mental obstructions and the cessation of dukkha.

Here we have another aspect of happiness indivisible from Nibbāna in the bright states of mind such as gratitude, humility and respect that arise along with the realization of Nibbāna:

> 20.16) When a bhikkhu's mind is thus liberated, he possesses three unsurpassable qualities: unsurpassable vision, unsurpassable practice of the way, and unsurpassable deliverance. When a bhikkhu is thus liberated, he still honours, reveres, and venerates the Tathāgata thus: "The Blessed One is enlightened and he teaches the Dhamma for the sake of enlightenment. The Blessed One is tamed and he teaches the Dhamma for taming oneself. The Blessed One is at peace and he teaches the Dhamma for the sake of peace. The Blessed One has crossed over and he teaches the Dhamma for crossing over. The Blessed one has attained Nibbāna and he teaches the Dhamma for attaining Nibbāna."
> ~ M 35.26 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)

During the Buddha's time many of his fellow Sakyans left the home-life and trained under him. One of these was Bhaddiya, who had been the clan ruler and had left his position to take ordination in a group which numbered such well-known disciples as Ānanda, Anuruddha, Devadatta, Bhagu and Upāli. During his first rains retreat Bhaddiya realized liberation; his story is recounted in the Udāna:

> 20.17) Thus have I heard. At one time the Lord was staying at Anupiyā in the Mango Orchard. At that time the Venerable Bhaddiya, Kāligodhā's son, on going into the forest to the foot of a tree or to an empty place, constantly uttered, "Ah, what bliss! Ah, what bliss!"
>
> A number of bhikkhus heard the Venerable Bhaddiya... constantly uttering, "Ah, what bliss! Ah, what bliss!" and the thought came to them: "No doubt, friend, the Venerable Bhaddiya, Kāligodhā's son, is dissatisfied with leading the holy life, since formerly when he was a householder he enjoyed the bliss of royalty. And when recollecting that, on going into the forest... he utters, 'Ah, what bliss! Ah, what bliss!'"
>
> Then a number of bhikkhus approached the Lord, prostrated themselves, sat down to one side, and reported this to the Lord.
>
> Then the Lord addressed a certain bhikkhu: "Come, bhikkhu, in my name tell the bhikkhu Bhaddiya, 'The Teacher calls you, friend Bhaddiya.'"
>
> "Very well, revered sir," the bhikkhu replied and approaching the Venerable Bhaddiya, Kāligodhā's son, he said, "The Teacher calls you, friend Bhaddiya."
>
> "Very well, friend," the Venerable Bhaddiya replied, and approaching the Lord he prostrated himself and sat down to one side. The Lord then said to him: "Is it true, Bhaddiya, that on going into the forest... you utter, 'Ah, what bliss! Ah, what bliss!'?"
>
> "Yes, revered sir. "
>
> "But, Bhaddiya, what do you see that prompts you to do so?"
>
> "Formerly, revered sir, when I was a householder and enjoyed the bliss of royalty, inside and outside my inner apartments guards were appointed; inside and outside the city guards were appointed; inside and outside the district guards were appointed. But, revered sir, although I was thus guarded and protected, I lived fearful, agitated, distrustful, and afraid. But now, revered

> sir, on going alone into the forest, to the foot of a tree or to an empty place, I am fearless, unagitated, confident, and unafraid. I live unconcerned, unruffled, my needs satisfied, with a mind become like a deer's. Seeing this, revered sir, prompts me, on going to the forest... to utter constantly, 'Ah, what bliss! Ah, what bliss!'"
> Then, on realizing its significance, the Lord uttered on that occasion this inspired utterance:
> "In whom exist no inner stirrings,
> Having passed beyond being this or that,
> Free from fear, blissful and sorrowless,
> The devas are not capable of seeing him."
> ~ Ud 2.10 (John D. Ireland trans.)

As can now be seen, Nibbāna brings forth the fruit of bliss. In turn, the factors leading to Nibbāna need to be nurtured along with the other seeds, terrain and aspects of cultivation laid out in the Buddha's teaching. This fruition is the Buddha's sole goal in dedicating his efforts to teaching and training others throughout his long and illustrious life.

All the teachings compiled in this collection are for aiding us in our search for well-being and peace. Having recognized that Nibbāna is a possibility for ourselves, we are able to take the seeds, prepare the ground, and cultivate the fruit. The bliss of tasting and being nourished by this fruit is a principle of nature that we are all able to realize. A last example illustrating this principle of Nibbāna as a state of intrinsic well-being also comes in the Udāna. In the previous sutta passage Bhaddiya describes the bliss of Nibbāna as experienced in this life. In this passage – after the passing away of Dabba the Mallian – the Buddha affirms that that Nibbānic bliss is not affected or altered by the death of the body.

> 20.18) Just as the bourn is not known
> Of the gradual fading glow
> Given off by the furnace-heated iron
> As it is struck with the smith's hammer,
> So there is no pointing to the bourn
> Of those perfectly released,
> Who have crossed the flood
> Of bondage to sense desires
> And attained unshakeable bliss.
> ~ Ud 8.10 (John D. Ireland trans.)

“If you don’t know where you are going,
you will wind up somewhere else.” ~ Yogi Berra

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CONCORDANCE I

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§2.18	S 6.15

3. This and That, and Other Things

§3.1	Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, unpublished Dhamma talk, 1988
§3.2	A 10.92; Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 'The Wings to Awakening,' pp 10-12
§3.3	S 12.20
§3.4	S 12.41, A 10.92 (partly quoted above)
§3.5	M 43.11
§3.6	Ud 1.10
§3.7	Iti 94
§3.8	Master Hsüan Hua, 'Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sūtra, with Commentary,' p 149
§3.9	Śhūrangama Sūtra, 1.169

4. "All That Is Conditioned…"

§4.1	Ud 3.10
§4.2	Ven. P.A. Payutto, 'Dependent Origination,' pp 14-5
§4.3	H.H. the Dalai Lama, 'The Four Noble Truths,' pp 53-57
§4.4	M 52.4-14, A 11.17
§4.5	S 22.81
§4.6	M 140.20-22
§4.7	M 102.4-25
§4.8	A 10.93
§4.9	Ajahn Chah, 'Toward the Unconditioned,' in 'Food for the Heart,' pp 385-9
§4.10	Ajahn Chah, 'Convention and Liberation,' in 'Food for the Heart,' p 307

5. "'To Be, or Not to Be' – Is That the Question?"

§5.1	Nyaṇatiloka Bhikkhu, 'Buddhist Dictionary,' p 106
§5.2	M 140.31
§5.3	Dhp 21

§5.4	A 6.49
§5.5	S 22.49
§5.6	S 1.20
§5.7	Nid 80.226
§5.8	S 22.59, MV 1.6
§5.9	M 144.9
§5.10	M 102.23-4
§5.11	A 3.32
§5.12	Ud 6.6
§5.13	M 2.7-8
§5.14	S 44.10
§5.15	M 1.3-194 (abridged)
§5.16	Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 'Noble Strategy,' pp 71-4
§5.17	Ud 4.1, A 9.3
§5.18	Ud 2.1
§5.19	Ud 3.10
§5.20	Iti 58
§5.21	M 22.37
§5.22	M 22.20
§5.23	A 6.101
§5.24	Ajahn Sucitto, 'The Dawn of the Dhamma,' p 97
§5.25	Ajahn Chah, 'No Abiding,' in 'Food for the Heart,' p 316
§5.26	ibid, pp 316-7
§5.27	M 75.12
§5.28	M 74.2-5
§5.29	M 102.12
§5.30	Iti 49
§5.31	MV 1.6, S 22.59
§5.32	S 12.15, S 22.90
§5.33	Ācariya Nāgārjuna, Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā, Ch.15
§5.34	M 49.27
§5.35	S 5.10
§5.36	'Spiritual Autobiography,' Ajahn Chah

6. Atammayatā: 'Not Made of That'

§6.1	Santikaro Bhikkhu, adapted from 'Evolution/Liberation,' 1989
§6.2	M 113.21
§6.3	M 137.19-20
§6.4	Richard Gombrich, 'Metaphor, Allegory, Satire,' pp 86-7
§6.5	Hsin Hsin Ming, the verses of the Third Ch'an Patriarch
§6.6	Luang Pu Dun, 'Atulo,' collected teachings compiled by Phra Bodhinandamuni
§6.7	A 1.150; in Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, 'The Magic of the Mind,' pp 49 & 52;
§6.8	A 4.24
§6.9	M 18.16-19

7. Attending to the Deathless

§7.1	A 3.128
§7.2	Stephen Collins, 'Selfless Persons,' pp 43-45
§7.3	M 64.9-16, A 9.36
§7.4	Iti 51
§7.5	A 9.37
§7.6	S 48.57 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli trans.)
§7.7	ibid, (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli trans.)
§7.8	A 10.58
§7.9	A 8.73
§7.10	M 49.23
§7.11	M 1.25

8. Unsupported and Unsupportive Consciousness

§8.1	Bhikkhu Bodhi, note 513, Majjhima Nikāya
§8.2	D 11.81-5, (Maurice Walshe trans.)
§8.3	ibid, (Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda trans.)
§8.4	Ven. P.A. Payutto, 'Dependent Origination,' pp 106-8
§8.5	Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, 'Concept and Reality,' p 66
§8.6	S 2.26, A 4.45
§8.7	Ajahn Chah, (anecdotal)
§8.8	Ud 1.10
§8.9	SN 873-4
§8.10	'Uppalamani,' unpublished biography of Ajahn Chah, by Phra Ong Nueng
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§8.12	A 10.6
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§8.20	ibid, (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)
§8.21	S 12.38
§8.22	S 22.53
§8.23	M 22.36
§8.24	S 12.64
§8.25	SN 752-3
§8.26	M 62.17
§8.27	S 4.19
§8.28	Sixth Patriarch's Sutra, Ch. 1, 'Action and Intention'

§8.29	Vajra Sūtra, Ch 10, 'The Adornment of Pure Lands'
§8.30	The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra, Ch 1
§8.31	ibid

9. The Unconditioned and Non-locality

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§9.2	Ud 8.1
§9.3	Ud 8.3, Iti 43
§9.4	Ud 8.4
§9.5	Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda, 'The Magic of the Mind,' pp 53-55
§9.6	Ācariya Nāgārjuna, Mūlamadyamaka-kārika, Ch 25
§9.7	Miln 323
§9.8	Miln 326-328
§9.9	Ajahn Chah, personal letter to Ajahn Sumedho
§9.10	S 1.1

10. The Unapprehendability of the Enlightened

§10.1	A 4.36
§10.2	'No Ajahn Chah,' back cover
§10.3	ibid, epigraph
§10.4	S 22.87
§10.5	Saṃyutta Nikāya, note 168, p 1081
§10.6	D 27.9
§10.7	M 18.12
§10.8	Iti 92
§10.9	SN 1133-43
§10.10	S 22.36
§10.11	M 43.35
§10.12	Iti 63
§10.13	M 22.36
§10.14	M 72.20
§10.15	S 44.1
§10.16	Gregory of Nyssa, in 'Prayer Without Language in the Mystical Tradition' by Fr Cyprian, in 'The Solace of Fierce Landscapes,' by Belden Lane
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§10.20	S 22.85
§10.21	A 4.174
§10.22	D 15.32

11. "'Reappears' Does Not Apply..."

§11.1	M 63.7-9
§11.2	M 72.16-20
§11.3	Dhammapada Commentary, to verses 419-20

§11.4	D 1.3.73
§11.5	S 35.83
§11.6	SN 1074-6, (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)
§11.7	ibid, (Ven. H. Sadhatissa trans.)
§11.8	SN 1118-9

12. Knowing, Emptiness and the Radiant Mind

§12.1	S 56.11
§12.2	Ajahn Chah, 'Food For the Heart,' pp 43-4
§12.3	Ajahn Mun, 'The Ballad of Liberation from the Five Khandhas,' ll 180-86
§12.4	ibid, ll 408-21
§12.5	Ajahn Chah, in 'Food for the Heart,' pp 157-8
§12.6	Upāsikā Kee Nanayon, 'An Unentangled Knowing,' p 33
§12.7	Ajahn Chah, in 'Venerable Father,' by Paul Breiter, p 154
§12.8	Ajahn Sumedho, 'What is the Citta?' Forest Sangha Newsletter,' Oct 1988
§12.9	Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 'Heartwood from the Bodhi Tree,' pp 51-2
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§12.12	D 16.2.25
§12.13	Vsm 21.70
§12.14	M 121
§12.15	S 20.7
§12.16	S 55.53
§12.17	S 22.95
§12.18	Dhp 46
§12.19	Dhp 170
§12.20	Vajra Sūtra, Ch.32
§12.21	'The Heart of Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra,' p 1
§12.22	A 4.142
§12.23	S 1.80
§12.24	A 1.61 & .62
§12.25	Ven. Ajahn Mun, 'A Heart Released,' p 23
§12.26	Ajahn Thate, 'Only the World Ends,' pp 47-9
§12.27	Ajahn Mahā Boowa, 'Straight From the Heart,' pp 139-140,
§12.28	ibid pp 152-55
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13. Practices and Perspectives I – The Gradual Path

§13.1	A 4.179
§13.2	A 10.60
§13.3	A 1.20.102
§13.4	Ud 5.5
§13.5	A 3.55
§13.6	M 26.19

§13.7	Iti 54 & 55
§13.8	M 107.3-11
§13.9	M 73.14
§13.10	M 29.7
§13.11	M 24.10
§13.12	A 3.100
§13.13	M 70.13, .22 & .23
§13.14	A 9.3, Ud 4.1
§13.15	M 117.34
§13.16	A 10.2
§13.17	M 118.15
§13.18	S 56.11
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§13.20	SN 1106-7 & 1111
§13.21	SN 1098
§13.22	A 1.182
§13.23	S 12.15
§13.24	Iti 49
§13.25	S 12.48
§13.26	S 12.18
§13.27	S 12.67

14. PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES II – SUDDEN PENETRATION

§14.1	M 10.2
§14.2	SN 1086-7
§14.3	S 48.54
§14.4	S 48.45
§14.5	A 7.58
§14.6	S 35.80
§14.7	Ajahn Chah, 'Food for the Heart,' p 241-2
§14.8	M 11.17
§14.9	S 35.131
§14.10	M 57.2-4
§14.11	S 22.80
§14.12	M 11.6-7
§14.13	M 74.6-8
§14.14	M 63.7-8
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§14.16	M 2.7-8
§14.17	M 109.15-18
§14.18	S 35.82
§14.19	S 35.116
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§14.25	M 72.15
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§14.32	Dhp 421
§14.33	Dhp 348
§14.34	Ajahn Chah, 'A Still Forest Pool,' p 73

15. Practices and Perspectives III – Path and Goal

§15.1	S 51.15
§15.2	M 106.10-15
§15.3	M 1.50
§15.4	A 9.36
§15.5	S 1.1
§15.6	Ajahn Chah, 'Food for the Heart,' p 339
§15.7	M 112.4, .6, .8 & .10
§15.8	A 10.7
§15.9	A 8.30
§15.10	S 2.5
§15.11	A 3.83
§15.12	S 52.9
§15.13	M 123.22
§15.14	M 122.4, .6 & .7
§15.15	A 4.96 & .99
§15.16	S 43.1

16. Sotāpanna: the spiritual turning point I

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§16.4	S 45.180
§16.5	M 118.9-12
§16.6	S 55.52
§16.7	D 18.1
§16.8	S 55.5
§16.9	A 4.240
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§16.12	D 3.2.21-22
§16.13	S 45.55
§16.14	M 2.3, .9-11
§16.15	S 22.122
§16.16	A 6.98 & .101 (combined)

§16.17	S 12.67
§16.18	A 5.260
§16.19	M 6.2-3 & .11
§16.20	D 2.101-2
§16.21	A 3.85
§16.22	MV 1.23
§16.23	S 12.68

17. SOTĀPANNA: THE SPIRITUAL TURNING POINT II

§17.1	D 5.29-30
§17.2	M 56.18 (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans.)
§17.3	ibid, (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu trans.)
§17.4	S 12.70
§17.5	S 45.9
§17.6	S 56.51
§17.7	S 12.27
§17.8	S 12.49
§17.9	S 22.109
§17.10	S 25.1
§17.11	S 48.3
§17.12	A 7.62

18. SOTĀPANNA: THE SPIRITUAL TURNING POINT III

§18.1	M 44.7
§18.2	Ajahn Chah, 'Being Dharma,' pp 166-7
§18.3	S 22.1
§18.4	S 24.1
§18.5	M 78.11
§18.6	S 55.1
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§18.10	S 45.159
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§18.12	M 48.7-15
§18.13	A 6.12
§18.14	M 115.12-13
§18.15	S 55.40

19. SOTĀPANNA: THE SPIRITUAL TURNING POINT IV

§19.1	S 56.51
§19.2	A 8.19
§19.3	M 142.6
§19.4	S 55.54
§19.5	Ud 8.8

§19.6	A 4.52
§19.7	S 55.41
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§19.11	A 6.97
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§19.15	M 34.9-12
§19.16	M 68.8-24

20. "AH, WHAT BLISS!" – THE BLESSINGS OF NIBBĀNA

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§20.2	'Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhuridatta Thera: A Spiritual Biography,' by Ācariya Mahā Boowa Ñānasampanno, p 276
§20.3	M 22.20
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§20.5	M 35.30
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§20.9	S 22.4
§20.10	Dhp 202-4
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§20.12	M 14.22
§20.13	S 36.19
§20.14	A 9.34
§20.15	S 36.31
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"There is an island, an island which you cannot go beyond. It is a place of nothingness, a place of non-possession and of non-attachment. It is the total end of death and decay, and this is why I call it Nibbāna."

The Buddha

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